SUE COE PROPAGANDHI FTAA

MEDIA READER

PROVIDING INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM FOR INDEPENDENT THINKERS NO4

MEDIAREADER

PO BOX 641544, CHICAGO, IL 60664-1544, USA

EDITOR
DAVE LANEY

ASSISTANT EDITOR
KATE MONAHAN

ILLUSTRATION
ROBY NEWTON

CONTRIBUTORS
DAVE BAILEY
TREY BUNDY
AL BURIAN
ANDREW DICKSON
RYAN GRIFFIS
ELIN SLAVICK
MICHELLE STEINBERG

REVIEWERS
AL BURIAN
SEAN HUSICK
DAVE LANEY
ROBY NEWTON

AD RATES
5X5=$65
7.5X5=$85
7.5X10=$125
PAYMENTS TO DAVE LANEY

CORRESPONDENCE, LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, AND ADS SHOULD BE SENT TO:

MEDIAREADER
POST BOX 641544
CHICAGO, IL 60664-1544

INFO@MEDIAREADER.ORG
WWW.MEDIAREADER.ORG

PRINTED AT BENSON PRINTING
BENSON, NC

PRESS RUN = 7,000

HELP DISTRIBUTE THIS MAGAZINE!

WE RELY ON PEOPLE LIKE YOU TO GET THIS MAGAZINE INTO LOCAL STORES, OUT AT ROCK SHOWS, AND DELIVERED THROUGH DISTROS. BECAUSE WE'RE A FREE PUBLICATION, IT'S DIFFICULT TO GET MORE CONVENTIONAL AND MAINSTREAM DISTRIBUTION. IF THERE'S NO MONEY IN IT FOR THE DISTRO, WHY WOULD THEY PAY POSTAGE TO GET THIS OUT TO STORES?

RATES
$5 = 40 COPIES
$10 = 125 COPIES

THIS MONEY COVERS THE POSTAGE, NOT A DIME MORE. WRITE FOR INTERNATIONAL RATES OR VISIT THE WEB SITE FOR PER ISSUE INFO.

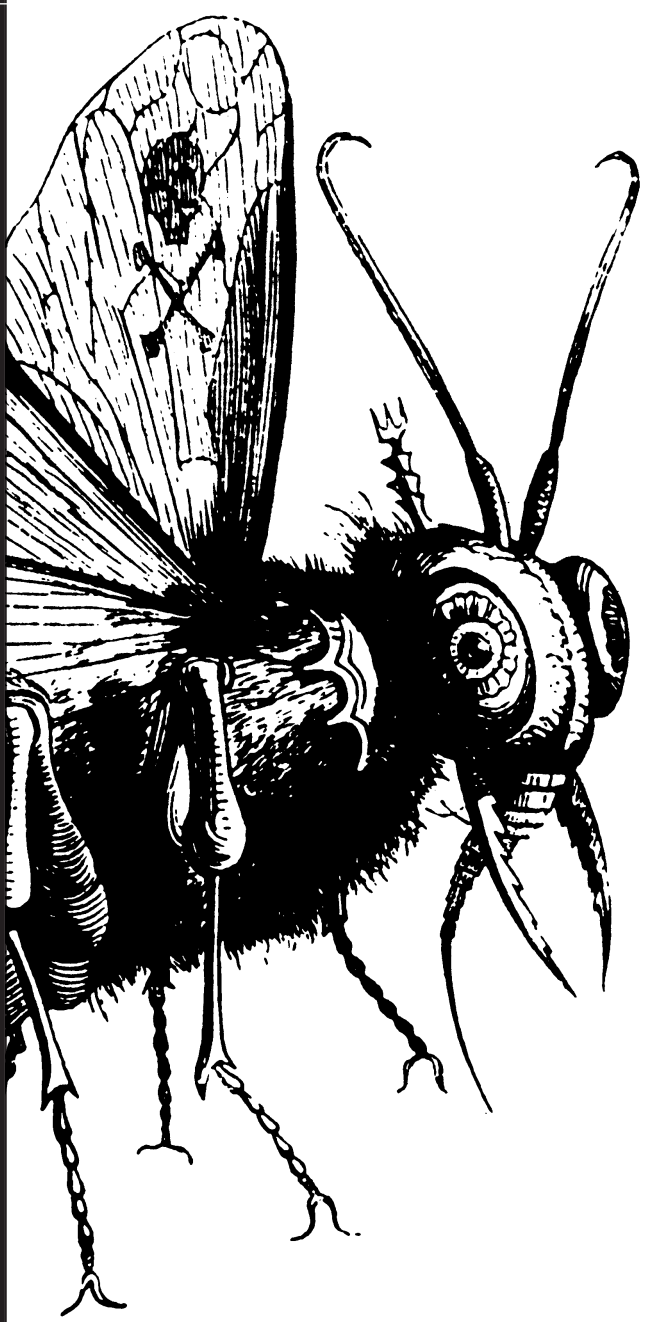


TABLE OF CONTENTS

04 Art <> Activism, An Interview with Sue Coe
11 The State of Cinema
14 Critical Arts Ensemble
19 Subversive Criminal Puppeteers: Update
20 Propagandhi
26 The War at Home, An Interview with Andrew Vachss
32 FTAA
42 Letters
43 Reviews
50 Advertising

Goat Outside Slaughterhouse © Sue Coe, from *Dead Meat*

ART < > ACTIVISM

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST

SUE COE

In the tradition of Kathe Kollwitz, Goya, and Daumier, Sue Coe makes art about horrible realities: AIDS, homelessness, slaughterhouses, war, laboratory testing and rape. Coe's art is a call to action, demanding a radical transformation of how we treat each other and animals. During her recent lecture at the University of North Carolina, where she agreed to do this interview with me via e-mail, she told this story: When the Dalai Lama was asked, "How do we change the world?" he answered, "By teaching our children to be kind to insects."

Sue Coe has exhibited her work in museums and galleries all over the world. She has contributed illustrations to Entertainment Weekly, The Progressive, The New Yorker (which she calls "a dentist's magazine"), The Nation, and The New York Times, and is the author of four books, including Dead Meat and Pit's Letter, both on Four Walls Eight Windows.

Sue Coe is one of the artists who has most influenced me — not only as a fellow artist, but as an educator, a political activist and a hungry individual. There is no other artist that I know of who is as generous, sincere, real, politically effective and consistent. She is committed to her beliefs and to the artistic process as the means of exposing realities in a way that stops us dead in our tracks. Sue Coe's powerful spine and her own claim that "every dollar I get drips with blood too" gives me hope.

There are different types of blood. There is blood spilled cruelly and selfishly for gluttony and profit. Then there is blood spilled for revolution. A stockholder in slaughterhouses could buy 20 of Sue Coe's prints. It's hard to imagine any dollar as an innocent one. We know there is at least one underpaid, uninsured, exploited worker along the way from raw material to the product we consume. Sue Coe's work exposes these contradictions, the complex dilemma of conspiring, however involuntarily, with a corrupt system. But I do believe any blood-soaked dollars in Sue Coe's wallet are ultimately soaked with blood for the cause, not against it, and if some stink of conspiracy and profit, she will make them smell of graphite, oil paint, and paper.

-elin slavick

ART < > ACTIVISM

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST

SUE COE

MR: I know you have made work about US Foreign Policy, AIDS, homelessness and many other sociopolitical issues. Is your recent focus on the meat industry and animal rights due to a shift in political consciousness? Does the issue of animal rights have a broader political implication to you?

Sue Coe: Of course all these issues are interconnected. My first work as a child was about animals. It is not a recent focus. I started this work in 1986. To do this type of work for so long is very labor intensive. Doing hundreds and hundreds of drawings and paintings on an issue is not something to be taken lightly. I have a strong connection to animal subject matter, and to this issue in particular. Although that does not exclude the art I have done, or the concerns around labor issues and AIDS.

Farm animals suffer such horrendous cruelty, which is totally denied by the American meat industry, and fully acknowledged by the European meat industry. The latter, based on independent scientific study, has learned enough to start phasing in new laws and phasing out factory farming over the next 11 years. We are looking at the global consequences of mad cow disease and pollution of our ground water, by-products of factory farming.

MR: As my friend was coming into your lecture, an animal rights activist told her she shouldn't come in because "Sue Coe is in there." My friend was wearing an old thrift shop coat I had given her with a real fur collar. It's not so much if you think the activist's strategy was a constructive or exclusive one that I'm interested in (although I DO wonder what you think about it), but more about how to handle contradictions in our lives. I think you wear a leather coat. I know you smoke. How do you reconcile the daily contradictions, living in this late-capitalist world, between making art and surviving?

Sue Coe: I would never judge another human being individually (in the scenario you suggested). We are all in different stages of awareness and growth. I am extremely critical of illogical economic systems that put profit over any and all other considerations, especially life. Personally I do not wear leather in any form, neither shoes nor jackets or coats. (The jacket you saw was some industrial by-product!) I rarely smoke, around a pack a year, that is about it, when I give lectures. This is not a personal justification, just setting the record straight. Gave up chain-smoking around four years ago. The phrase I would use for myself is 'aspiring

Capital/Labor © Sue Coe, from *Dead Meat*

Cut and Run © Sue Coe, from *Dead Meat*

vegan,' as I use film for a camera and also drive an automobile, which I assume has animal parts in it somewhere. So, it comes down to doing the best one can, avoiding products that are made by slave labor, or where human and animal rights are violated. The consumer will dictate how the market changes and it may mean we have to pay more for food and clothing that is cruelty free. Americans spend less that 11% of their disposable income on food, the cheapest in the world. That has come at great expense in terms of suffering. When polled, the American consumer said that they were willing to pay more for more humane farming methods—for example, no battery cages for hens, no veal crates, and no gestation crates for sows.

MR: I'm sure you are "accused of" being a "propagandist." What have been some of your responses to that accusation? I personally love the aesthetics of lots of propaganda, from Russian and American to German and Italian. Do you like "the look" of propaganda even if you disagree with the ideology? Do you think there is a difference between being a propagandist and being an artist?

Sue Coe: The word Propaganda comes from the Roman Catholic Church. In the 15th Century, they had Offices of Propaganda. The word merely means to propagate ideas. It fell on evil days during the First World War, when the cannon fodder (the masses) heard how many young men were dying in the trenches and started to object. The government retaliated by saying they were being affected by 'enemy propaganda.' I think propaganda (let us say political satire, etc.) has its place, and I have done my share of it, but as an artist, apart from the aesthetic, it's quite tedious to do.

After a while, the Bushes and Thatchers and Reagans are all the same—just good puppets. For the politician, it's more 'face time' for them, and they usually want to own the artwork. It appeals to their ego. So not only are they not crushed, they are quite pleased with the attention. Therefore, I do not plan to waste the next four years making portraits of George W. Art is anything that the onlooker takes into their heart; it could be a billboard, or a cartoon, or a fresco.

Sheep Trying to Escape © Sue Coe, from *Dead Meat*

MR: During your lecture you said "When I do PhotoShop it's like swimming the Atlantic in a wheelchair." Is it the process that's so difficult or the product that's unsatisfactory?

Sue Coe: I am sure the product is a work of genius. For me personally, the process is clumsy and not intuitive. The larger issue, I think, is the expense of the product and the expense to update the product, and the assumption that not owning the product places one at a disadvantage. A pencil is very inexpensive. Practically anyone on the planet can have one and in the right hands it can be a powerful witnessing tool. When we learn to draw, we learn how to think and see. Art is about slowing down time, not speeding it up—although I have noticed that a painting made with a computer takes me around ten times longer than actually painting it from scratch!

MR: While I know you sell your prints "cheap, cheap, cheap," often for only twenty dollars after your lectures, with all proceeds going to Farm Sanctuary, I also know you have a very serious uptown West 57th Street gallery in New York City, Galerie St. Etienne. Are you the only contemporary artist with Galerie St. Etienne? (I usually see Egon Schiele, George Grosz, Otto Dix, and Oskar Kokoshka when I'm there.) Is Galerie St. Etienne your primary connection to the art world?

Sue Coe: All the profit goes to Farm Sanctuary. My printer takes money for paper and ink and for printing them. He kindly donates most of his labor. Yes, the gallery is serious. It is serious about the integrity of the work that is shown, and how and to whom that work is marketed. The address of the gallery was never an issue for me. The reason I chose St. Etienne was because they represent Kathe Kollwitz, with whom they and I feel there is an organic relationship. I believe I am the only contemporary (as in currently alive) artist they represent at this time. Of course, they knew many of the other artists when they were alive! The gallery fosters a type of dignity and respect for art that I admire, and goes beyond the merchandising seen in most galleries. In economic terms 'the art world' does not support this type of work, and I have managed to devise ways to live on small amounts of money and still be a working artist.

MR: Do you survive on the work you do for magazines, like Rolling Stone, Entertainment Weekly, and The Progressive?

Sue Coe: I do not work for The Progressive anymore, and cannot remember when I last worked for Rolling Stone…years ago. Yes, I have always earned a living from working for magazines and newspapers, since age 17. It's my bread and margarine money.

MR: During your lecture you also said, "If art doesn't change anything, I'll be a full-time activist." Do you think your art HAS changed things? Do you believe that art CAN change the world? Can you imagine a time

Sea of Pigs © Sue Coe, from *Dead Meat*

when you won't make art?

Sue Coe: It is not for me to say if my work has changed things. It is for others to say. People have told me that they have been changed. People change the world all the time. They do it in many ways. We are the changes we want to see.

MR: What do you think of contemporary art, specifically those artists considered to be "political artists," like Alfredo Jaar, Salbastio Salgado, Hans Haacke, Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Carrie Mae Weems, Shirin Nishat, and Mona Hatoum. Do you feel part of an artistic community or just an activist one? Are these two split for you?

Sue Coe: I love all art and artists whose work has content, and who stay committed. As life is short and time is short, especially if one is focused on doing work, the people I feel are my community (family) are animal rights activists, and in terms of art, more in the printmaking/illustration/cartooning community. I like the collaborative comix of a group called World War 3.

MR: I see your work in the spirit of John Heartfield and Honore Daumier. Do you feel more of an affinity with those long-ago artists than you do with contemporary artists?

Sue Coe: Well, yes and no. I am primarily an artist for the printed page, thus the affinity with the above, and of course the content, but the social conditions were so different for those artists. As for contemporary artists whom I respect: Bouvais Lyons, Jean Quick to See Smith, Eric Drooker, Eric Avery, and a lot of girl gang comix artists like Fly. These are all artists of the printed page, or they make prints.

MR: While you are a self-proclaimed feminist and activist-artist, you do not like to be categorized as a "feminist artist" or as a "political artist." Why?

Sue Coe: Because the most political art is the art of ambiguity. If that is categorized first, then I can be categorized last.

MR: Why did you leave England? Do you plan to stay in the United States? Are you a U.S. citizen? Did you vote? Do you think there is much of a difference between Blair's New Labour Party and Clinton's Democratic Party, or between Bush and Gore?

Sue Coe: I have lived here all my adult life, since 20 years old anyway. I have lived here longer than in the U.K. I am a citizen of nowhere. For sure, I am more American than British, at this stage. Of course there are differences between Bush and Gore, but if I explained what they were, I would put myself to sleep.

MR: You ended your lecture with a story of the joy you felt watching freed and de-beaked chickens take their first steps and spread their wings. Do you think that joy is possible for the majority of living things in our world?

Sue Coe: Well, I don't know if joy is possible for every living being, but every living being does their utmost to avoid suffering and pain.

MR: How would you define yourself politically? Are you a Marxist, a Socialist, an Anarchist, or something else?

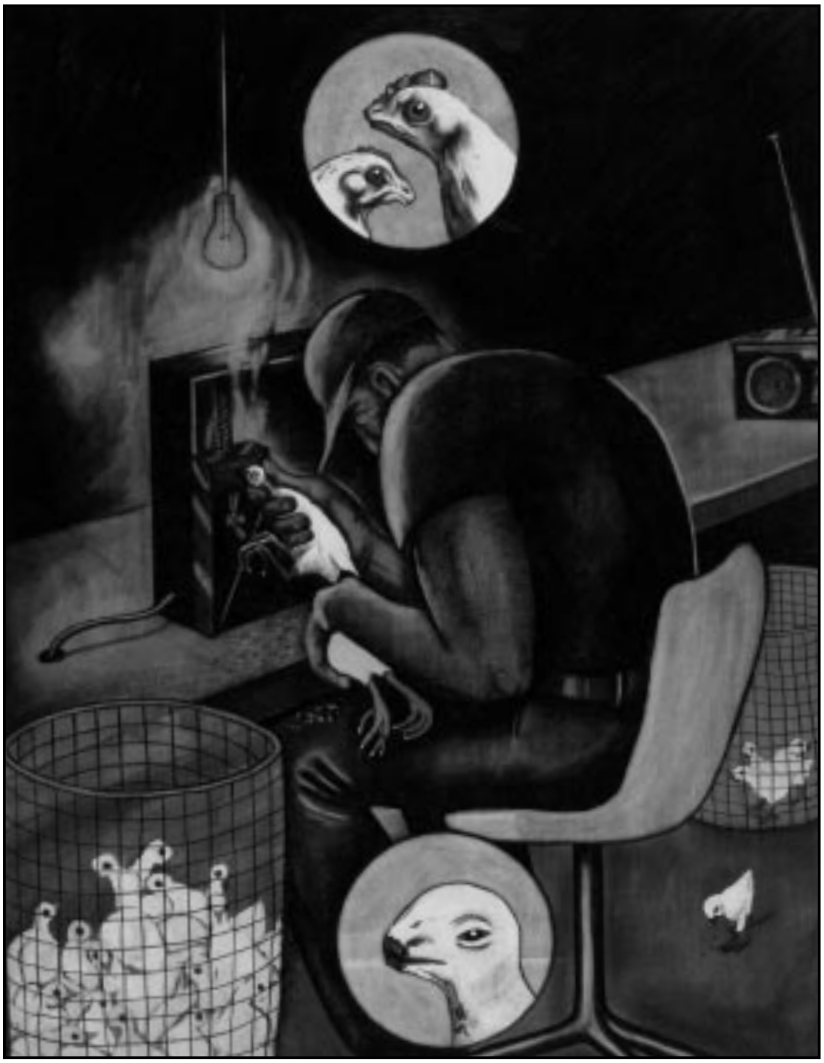
Sue Coe: I don't define myself politically. I will leave that to others. When I meet anyone or look at their work, I want to see and hear clearly what they are saying, the essence of what they wish to communicate. Political definitions are a way people distance themselves from the content. Ideologies can interfere with listening, and it is not useful to label oneself in a vacuum. As an artist, I desire that the viewer look through my eyes, see what I have seen, not look at the color of my eyes.

MR: One thing everybody comments on after your lectures is how hilarious you are, even though you're talking about such unbelievable levels of cruelty, tragedy, death, and truth—like the fact that they throw baby male chicks into the dumpsters alive, people dying of AIDS, your mother's death, or mad cow disease. The whole audience is laughing between tears. Is humor your strategy for survival and for communication? Or could you have been a stand-up comedian?

Sue Coe: I am fearful of boring people. With all these paintings of horror (reality), I try and show that we are human, and can be really silly, despite the horror.

MR: You have a lot of hope that the laws regarding the way animals die in slaughterhouses will change within the next ten years. How does this feel like a possible victory to you? The animals would still die. People would still be killing and eating them and going mad. It makes me think of that movie "Dr. Death," about the Holocaust revisionist man who designs electric chairs to be more humane.

Sue Coe: They are steps in the process of eliminating the slaughter—that has to be made clear. We want to end all slaughter of animals for food. It is



Debeaking © Sue Coe, from *Dead Meat*

cruel and unnecessary. For short-term profit, the meat industry is polluting the planet. We need to make the transition to a plant-based diet. It is illogical, even in terms of capitalism, to continue this type of intensive farming, although the word 'farm' is a misnomer, as applied to the Wall Street branch of animal slaving. The costs to the farmer are huge, and the cost to society is larger. In the meantime, today and tomorrow and this year, nine billion animals will die in the U.S.A. There is legislation covering how animals are slaughtered (this took one hundred years to implement), but chickens are not covered by 'humane' slaughtering laws. It is the treatment of animals prior to being slaughtered that needs changing first.

There are no farm animal cruelty laws, no regulations controlling their transportation to slaughter, or laws governing cage sizes. I wish people could wake up tomorrow and not eat meat, and there would be no more factory farms, but that is the reality. With mad cow disease looming on the horizon, I think people will be eating much less meat than before. We need to educate the public about how their 'food' is raised. I believe in the goodness of people, and I think people are intelligent enough to make a choice. Open the doors to the slaughterhouses and the factory farms. Let people see how sows are tethered in crates their entire lives, standing on slats or concrete, not enough room to turn around. Pigs, in a natural state, would spend 70% of their waking hours exploring their environment, making nests, rooting in the dirt, and socializing. Veal calves, too weak to stand, fed just milk, are chained and crated until they are slaughtered. Scientists now say that milk cows are as fatigued as a human running a marathon and half every day of their short lives—that is the stress on their bodies from producing so much milk. And the chickens, who live without enough room to stretch their wings, 6 to a cage, until they are slaughtered, bones so weak from the lack of movement that they develop stress fractures.

I do not believe that 'welfarist' type laws governing farm animals will end their slaughter. I do not think it is in the welfare of any animal to be eventually slaughtered. These are two separate issues. Under this economic system, the pressure is on to the small farm to get larger or go under, and most have gone under. What is not seen is: the larger the farm, the larger the cost. I think that this struggle to improve the living conditions of factory-farmed animals raises the awareness of the American public (the consumer). It takes the pressure off the small farmer, who can be provided with grants to change farming methods from animal- to plant-based, and will eventually lead to the elimination of factory farming methods entirely.

MR: You said, "All saints are gay." Do you think that gay and lesbian, animal, civil, and human rights are all linked in the same struggle?

Sue Coe: Yes. They are all interconnected, although animal issues are different, because the subject of the oppression is mute. Humans, given free speech, can vocalize the terms of their own liberation.

MR: Is there anything else you would like to say that I didn't touch upon in my questions?

Sue Coe: I would like to ask people to go to www.farmsanctuary.org to investigate farm animal cruelty, see vidMR and documentation of downed animals and the conditions in factory farms, and what we can do to change it. People can visit rescued farm animals at two Farm

Andrew Dickson is a union set dresser who just finished touring his first feature film, good grief. He can be contacted at acdickson@hotmail.com

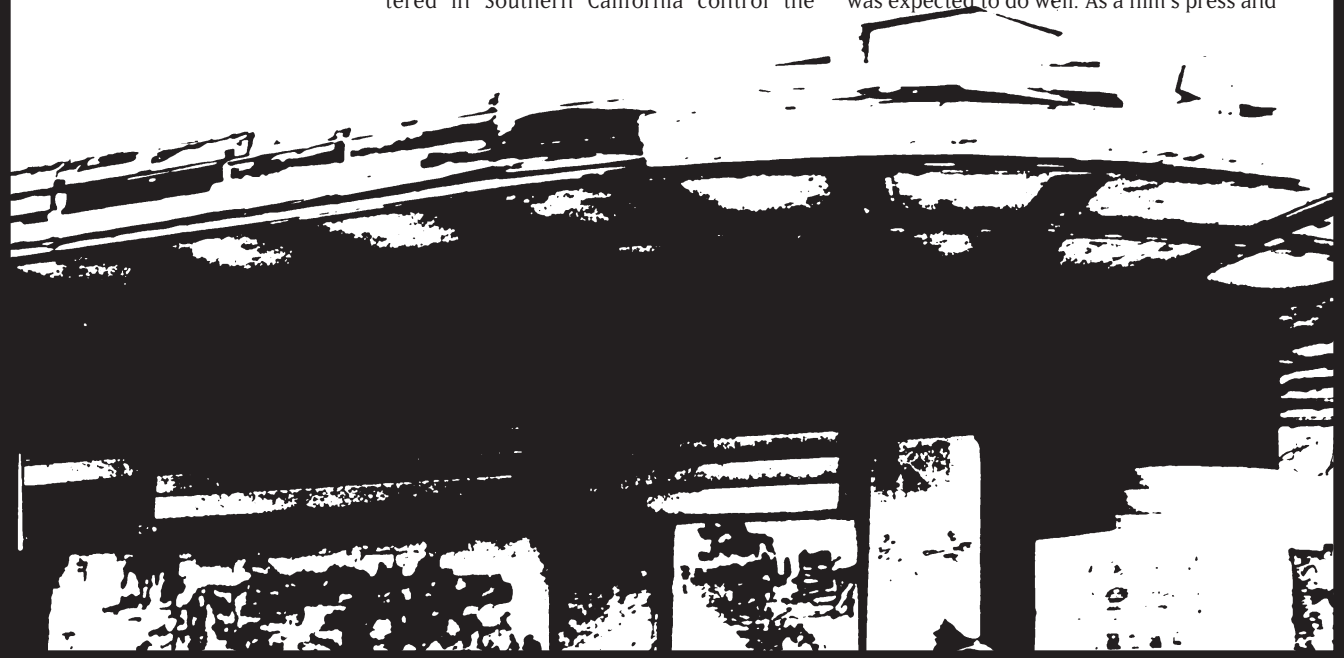
ARTICLE BY ANDREW DICKSON

THE STATE OF CINEMA

Film and television are undeniably one of the first places that we learn how to ask someone out on a date, how to kiss, how to rebel against our parents, how to act in general. Often our own experiences are best described by explaining: "it was just like the time in that movie..." To be sure, parents, peers, teachers, relatives, and even strangers teach us about the same things, and thankfully, are often on hand to tell us that things aren't quite the way they seem in our modern cinematic parables. Nevertheless, most people can point to moments from films or TV that influenced who they are and how they see the world.

I believe cinema and television to be the most powerful socializing tools available to date. A very small group of capitalists centered in Southern California control the means of distribution for this media here in the States and around the world. The expensive nature of filmmaking, due in large part to the 100-million-dollar budgets now commonplace in Hollywood, give these very same businessmen a virtual monopoly over the means of production as well. Scary. However, we are now entering what may be the first window of time where the rest of the world has access to the tools of production, and the means to distribute the films that result.

About 25 years ago, the process of film distribution in America (and hence worldwide) changed significantly. Film scholars point to Jaws as the first modern-day blockbuster. Before Jaws, a film like Taxi Driver or Breathless would be released in one theater in each market, usually the one at which it was expected to do well. As a film's press and



AS CONSERVATIVE POLITICIANS DECRY THE AGENDA AND DISSENTING OPINION OF HOLLYWOOD FILMS FROM MAINSTREAM VALUES, ONE SHIVERS TO PONDER WHAT THEY WOULD PREFER.

word-of-mouth support increased, it would be brought to other theaters, creating a wave of movie-going that allowed other, more challenging films to find an audience. With Jaws, the rules changed. Films started to be released in every theater available, and the rising budgets were expected to be made back on opening weekend. From this point on, story took a back seat to the money shots and sound bites tailor-made for the attention-grabbing two-minute trailers that would ensure a successful run.

This isn't to say that films made before this point were pillars of moral righteousness. They were, like society itself, sometimes racist, homophobic, and sexist. But the Jaws model of moviemaking replaced the art of carefully crafting films that didn't set records at the box office. Art films with ensemble casts lacking superstars were phased out, akin to the disappearance of small-town mom and pop hardware stores after Wal-Mart comes to town. Filmmakers who were trying to address problems and issues in society in a thoughtful, critical manner found their ideas disregarded by producers and movie moguls. Those who tried to work outside of corporate control couldn't get distribution. As profits eclipsed moral responsibility, Hollywood became a playground for stereotypes and rehashed plots. This problem persists today.

Recent films like The Legend of Bagger Vance and Dungeons & Dragons represent regressions in the way Blacks are represented in film. Go to any multiplex to find examples of weak female characters, there as mere props serving the male characters' dramatic and sexual needs. Middle Easterners, Indians, Native Americans, Japanese, gays, lesbians, and just about every other minority can point to recent films where they were portrayed negatively, stereotypically, and predictably. The irony is that these films are made by very well-educated, predominately liberal adults. As conservative politicians decry the agenda and dissenting opinion of Hollywood films from mainstream values, one shivers to ponder what they would prefer.

The obvious problem is that the films which monopolize theaters worldwide are made by committee—a slate of producers who want to make what sells best. The visionary writer/director has been replaced by producers who have the dubious power to rewrite drama into romantic comedy. Most of the Hollywood films that come to a small town or go overseas—arguably the places most in need of an alternative vision of American society—have been manhandled by dozens of people. These films may have been written by one or two people, or adapted from a single author's novel, but it is not uncommon to have 20 or 30 writers work on a script. Bring in a female writer to work on the lead actress's dialogue, bring in an A-list writer to add some 'heart.' There are a gaggle of producers, each one a bit more creatively frustrated, and more eager to add their own reinterpretation of the last entertaining movie they saw, and all possessing veto power with directors who are often expendable. Ultimately, the studio has final say as to whether the film is a go-picture, usually depending on how "safe" the film is and how closely it resembles something that has worked before.

Equally depressing is that the film industry has done to film what they never could to music—co-opted the notion of independence. With a few exceptions, so- called "independent" films are as vile as Hollywood films. Seldom are they any more challenging to anyone's worldview than blockbuster fare, and they are usually more violent. The popular notion of an independent film is a bunch of pretty faces swiped from the covers of Details magazine, riding across the desert with a dead body in the trunk, guns at the hip, and with a stop at the next strip joint on tap. To be sure, most of what calls itself independent film is the modern day B-movie.

The major studios have all bought or started their own 'art' studios—recycling the same regressive notions of society, but adding more style. What masquerade as independent films are 5-million-dollar studio projects destined to be either a tax write-off or the 'surprise hit of Sundance.' One is hard-pressed to find anything encouraging on the American narrative feature landscape.

Even the latest American film movement, the ensemble actors' picture, embodied by films like American Beauty, Happiness, Magnolia, and Friends and Neighbors, has shown its true face. While these films allow actors to break from the chains of the predictable plots and rehashed scenes of more mainstream fare, one starts to see this supposed "New American Cinema" as little more than high- production-value soap opera: high-brow Jerry Springer; upper-class filmmakers exposing upper middle-class white America as perverted and morally bankrupt—not exactly a news flash. It may be refreshing to see films where themes like repressed homosexuality, pedophilia, incest, and self-hatred are explored, but ultimately it's like watching a car wreck. After we've driven past, we don't gain anything, we just feel a little sick.

But there is hope. In the last few years there have been significant developments in the digital and video technology that might allow for a significant shift in the ways movies and televised entertainment are made in this country and beyond. Part of the problem in the past was the ever-rising expense of film stock, equipment, lab processing and printing, and hard-to-find editing facilities that often end a project before it's done. Now, you can get a digital video camera that will plug right into an Apple G4. You can shoot footage, instantly download it into a bootlegged copy of the Final Cut Pro program, edit it for as long as you like, and output it back to your camera. You now have a master without any loss of

quality which you can transfer to film, broadcast quality video, consumer-ready VHS, or onto the World Wide Web. The whole setup, with enough tape to keep you busy for months, will cost you less than three grand, with prices dropping and technology improving at a breakneck pace. Even better, because these components are so cheap, film schools, cable access stations, and filmmaker collectives are able to buy them in great numbers. In many cases, you can easily find access to all these components for free.

Already there is an explosion of films being made in the basements and bedrooms of America. The otherwise brilliant film critic Ray Carney asserts that this is problematic. He yearns for the time when only a dedicated painter and his minions would spend the weeks it took to make paint suitable for canvas, back when only great paintings were made. Today's corner art store with its cheap, consumer-grade paint, he argues, has created a glut of mediocrity. I would argue that a world where everyone is a filmmaker, painter or dancer is a better world; the probability of exposing the next Cassavettes, Cindy Sherman, or Basquiat increases. Making art, even bad art, increases self-esteem, happiness, appreciation for art in general, and improves how you relate to and contribute to your community. There is no doubt that horrible, unwatchable, offensive films will be made. Some people will recycle the same regressive social trends Hollywood film throws at us, but there will also be great, challenging works of art that have until now only existed in the minds of frustrated filmmakers.

Now how are these amazing, albeit low-budget and sometimes hard to watch works going to be seen? The local mall isn't likely to open up every 10th screen in the multiplex. Even small independent theaters will prefer to show foreign films with money-making potential and challenging modest budget American work. The Internet may be the venue of the future. To be sure, this method of distribution is in its infancy. Most people who have watched video on the Internet are likely to wait a few years before they tune in again. The image is usually broken up and tends to be smaller than a driver's license. Yet we can look forward to the day where Internet video streaming fills the entire screen at a quality close to offline video. The fusion of our computers, stereos, telephones and televisions into a central console, though a somewhat horrifying prospect, will, however, break down the current paradigm of limited options. Imagine tuning in and being able to ignore the latest crap from ABC and find endless documentaries, personal experimental films, and features, new and old, from around the world.

Already there are dozens of websites dedicated to showing films made outside the Hollywood system. For the most part, they are funny short films, stepping-stones to the next Rob Schneider film. But look a little harder, and you will find some gems. As the technology improves, it will be possible to see, for instance, a feature film from Iran that only showed at the big-city international film festivals. How profit and commerce will enter into the picture and change the landscape is yet to be determined. To be sure, it will be a struggle as Hollywood tries to co-opt, buy out, rip off, or bury work beyond its control. But there is a possibility that the process of finding an audience will be democratized.

In the meantime, as we wait for the Internet to catch up to its promise, independent filmmakers who are making work on their home computers may need to look no further than independent music to find a model for distribution and exhibition of their films. As films become cheaper to make, touring with them provides a realistic opportunity to recoup costs or even make a small profit. More importantly, your work will be seen on the big screen by an audience. My personal hope is that independent film labels form that could sell tapes to video stores and help book films in smaller video theaters, like ATA in San Francisco, that will hopefully continue to crop up around the country. If filmmakers can make the work that they want to make, and not feel like as though they have to pander to the Hollywood notion of a film in order to eventually make money, interesting work will flourish. These labels would eventually navigate the changes that will happen with the web, and help insure that a truly independent voice be heard in the small towns of America and the world.

The challenge for the next generation will be to see if there really are new kinds of filmmaking we haven't yet considered—to take risks that were before unthinkable. Are there a myriad of unique voices out there, laboring in obscurity, craving to be heard, that have until now been denied access to the tools of production or a platform to reach their audience?

I don't want to discredit the amazing work that has been going on since the birth of film as an art form in world cinema, experimental film, documentaries, and the occasional Hollywood or 'independent' film. The films that make us question film itself, our society, and ourselves are necessary for film to fulfill its promise as an art form rather than just entertainment. A challenge for the future will be to facilitate a way for this art to reach not only the converted audiences that will appreciate it, but also the unconverted that will be changed by it. ◂◂

THESE LABELS WOULD EVENTUALLY NAVIGATE THE CHANGES THAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THE WEB, AND HELP INSURE THAT A TRULY INDEPENDENT VOICE BE HEARD IN THE SMALL TOWNS OF AMERICA AND THE WORLD.

Tandem Surfing the Third Wave

Part One: Critical Art Ensemble and Tactical Media Production

Interview by Ryan Griffis

CRITICAL

This interview, with Critical Art Ensemble, is the first part of a series of investigations into collaborative/group artistic practice taking place in, and critical of, the e-conomy.

Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), a collective of five artists established in 1987, produces cultural products ranging from books to Web projects to performances that investigate moments in art, technology, activism, and critical theory.

MR: How did CAE come to be a working group?

Critical Art Ensemble: It's too bad CAE has no heroic formation story like the one the Situationists are often mythologized as having. CAE's story is much more mundane. We were students looking to develop a network that would have a cultural impact—some way of organizing that would give us enough financial, hardware and labor resources that we could begin to construct a platform for a public voice. Collective activity seemed (and still seems) to be the best option.

MR: Many people, including artists, don't understand how most individual artists finance their work, much less large-scale public work projects and ephemeral / "conceptual" works. With the work that your group (among others) is involved in, being politically involved and controversial in a way that doesn't always lead to ticket sales, as well as being potentially expensive (time- and resource-wise), could you talk some about the economic strategies of CAE as a collaborative venture?

CAE: We don't understand how to finance work either. No granting agency has ever given CAE money. We raise funds in three ways. First, we all have straight jobs. Second, we do a lot of visiting artist and speaking gigs in conjunction with writing, so we get royalties, writer's fees, and speaking fees. This money goes exclusively toward projects. Finally, we try to throw as many expenses as possible at any institution that wants to sponsor a project. We just hobble along from project to project, usually working with an extremely limited budget. A lot of our imaginative power goes into figuring out how to make things for minimal cost. However, it's better than it was when we first started. At least we don't have to liberate materials anymore.

MR: CAE has written quite a bit of theory for the practice of collaborative art activity, and from a perspective of involvement. At the current time, where does the group see itself and other art/activist groups in relation to other practices? For example, the (very youth-oriented) electronically aided organizing efforts of recent demonstrations in Philly, L.A., and D.C.?

CAE: It all depends on what the group is geared toward doing. Over the past five years, CAE has focused primarily on biotechnology and the colonization bonanza that it is launching. We are working in a very straightforward manner and trying to do events that demonstrate, through participatory theater, just what is at stake. Other groups, like the Institute for Applied Autonomy (www.appliedautonomy.com), are focused on ground developments, with projects like Graffiti Writer (a remote-controlled, programmable graffiti-writing robot) or their GPS project, designed to offer protesters escape routes so that they pass by the minimum amount of surveillance hardware when on the run. There is so much to be done. Happily, there is no single metanarrative that describes intercollective associations, or that maps the intersection between groups working on direct material levels and those working in cultural representation.

MR: I've read statements from a member of RTMark expressing uncertainty about the labeling of their activity as art, or rather how the label can be a double-edged sword. I have also heard Guillermo Gomez-Pena say (of his and Sifuentes' work) that they can get away with much more than straight activists because they're artists. How does CAE deal with the reception issue, and are there times when the "Art" label is useful, and others when it's not?

CAE: If CAE has to pick a label, we prefer "tactical media practitioners." However, in keeping with this tendency, we use labels in a tactical manner. If the situation is easier to negotiate using the label "artist," then we will use it; if it's better to use "activist" or "theorist" or "cultural worker," then we will use those labels. Regardless of the label, our activities stay the same. Labels are useful only in so far as they set expectations among those with whom we wish to have a dialogue. The label that best taps the knowledge resources of the audience is the one we try to choose.

A lot of this problem has to do with the social constructions of the roles of artist and activist. For the most part, these roles are placed within a specialized division of labor, where one role, segment, or territory is clearly separated from the other. We view ourselves as hybrids in terms of role. To CAE, the categories of artist and activist are not fixed, but liquid, and can be mixed into a variety of becomings. To construct these categories as static is a great drawback because it prevents those who use them from being able to transform themselves to meet particularized needs.

MR: In looking at many art strategies that have taken an "oppositional" stance towards the various forms of hegemonic oppression, be it blatantly political or theoretical, they usually seem to become assimilated into the larger art world. Overtly political artists become just that (Haacke) and more theoretical work becomes academic style (Kosuth, Art-Language). But such criticism seems to suggest that to become mainstream is death, so opposition is forever doomed to stay marginal. But it would also seem that our society (and probably most others) are resistant to drastic change, without catastrophe, and such assimilation is a necessity—one that must be carefully watched, but a necessity nonetheless. What are CAE's thoughts on such issues? And how does this play out specifically through CAE's interventions into a discourse like biotech?

CAE: Whether to take a position at the center or on the margins really depends on the goals that have been set by the individual or group. The reasons for doing projects on the margins are obvious. Work in such areas is great for education and organizing. From a collective history viewpoint, many individuals and groups working on a specific issue can bring about some positive changes. Working at the center is trickier, because, as you stated, it can always be used by the center for its own ends. The same can be said when the margins are organized well enough to have a public voice. Take the example of ACT-UP. This group collectively changed the protocols at the NIH in regard to HIV. At the same time, it was used as an example of democratic action that can impact bureaucracy, an example of people having free speech, etc. In many ways the movement was used to reinforce the public perception that democracy exists in capitalist economy. Someone like Hans Haacke is used in this

same manner on a cultural level. However, the ability of the sight machine to reconfigure resistant actions (particularly once they address the center) is not a reason to criticize. If a group is creating resistant initiatives as a public practice (as opposed to an underground or otherwise hidden practice) then the cycle of resistance and assimilation is just a given. The important thing to watch is how well a group negotiates this give and take, and not whether or not it does it perfectly.

In the realm of biotech, CAE is just trying to make a specialized discourse a public (non-specialist) one. CAE is worried that non-specialists in general may not understand the significance of the biological revolution. So many elements are hidden and there is so much misinformation (generally from market directives and science fiction) that it is difficult just to create a reasonable discussion. Specialization is a scary thing under these conditions. Unlike with the communications revolution, few people (directly) use the applications and information from the biorevolution, although almost all are indirectly touched by it. Since the public has almost no direct experience with biotech, it seems abstract and too difficult for a non-specialist to understand. CAE's intervention in this situation is to give people direct experience and reliable information so that individuals can come to understand that biotech is within their power to think about and actively affect.

MR: Speaking of the genetic engineering and biotechnology developments that CAE has investigated, there seems to be a lot of overlap with concerns coming out of communication technologies, that other groups, like RTMark and The Redundant Tech. Initiative, are taking on. Many aspects of CAE's activities appear to address this as well in different ways. Could you address some of these overlapping issues occurring between biological and communications technologies?

CAE: There are two primary narratives in regard to this issue. The first is the digital, and the second is control. Recent developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) and in biotechnology are on a parallel course. Contemporary ICT is slightly ahead of biotech, but they are both products of the digital era. When speaking of the "digital," CAE means this in a grander sense than just as a category of technology. We are speaking of a worldview, of a new cosmology. When we use the term "digital," we are referring to the idea of replication. Western cosmology has traditionally been analogic. That is, a process which moves from chaos to order and back to chaos, and products which exist in a binary pattern—the original and the counterfeit. For centuries, the principle that order came from chaos and chaos from order was unchallenged. This situation really started to change in the early 20th century with Fordist mass-manufacturing. Ford intuitively understood the digital in terms of manufacture, in that he knew the distinction between the original and the counterfeit was actually an impediment to profit, and that profitability was increased by employing principles of replication and equivalence. This new model was directly understood and addressed in the development of digital technology—the technology of replication and equivalence. The model is based on the principle that order comes from order. Such an idea had tremendous impact on biology because without it, the reproductive process could not be understood, since biological reproductive process is about replication. Once this idea was accepted, it was possible to understand DNA in a whole new way. Manufacturing, ICT and biotechnology (the primary markers of the 20th Century) are linked in that they share this new principle of order from order.

The second narrative, control, also links ICT and biotech. Both of these revolutions are about greater determinacy in complex systems. ICT primarily functions as a means to improve the gathering, storing, exchange and distribution of information in the virtual world. Biotech is about the same processes in the realm of the organic. Through improved control of complex systems, capital can achieve its own ends in terms of constructing bigger and more efficient profit machines and maintaining the social hierarchies that best lubricate this machine. Take the example of work. ICT has contributed to its intensification to such an extent that the worker's body (particularly the technocrat's) is failing to function in the high velocity marketplaces of capital (since the body is a low-velocity constellation). Biotech is partially an initiative to prop the body up, to redesign it, so it can keep up with the demands of a society of speed.

MR: With respect to GE/GM technology and human medicine, what are the group's interests in visualizing aspects of this technology that have a significant impact on access to healthcare and other privileges relating to the understanding of "healthy" vs. "unhealthy"? For example, denied access to managed health care, or jobs, based on "genetic predispositions."

CAE: The group hasn't really addressed this issue specifically, although it does come up in relation to our investigations into the reconfiguration of eugenics in pancapitalist economy. The question for CAE is perhaps broader, and concerns categories such as fit/unfit or normal/abnormal. These categories clearly stretch beyond the specialization of healthcare and into generalized social and political organization. As tactical media artists, the group has completed four major projects examining various aspects of biotech revolution in a theatrical form that invites public participation (participatory theater). These works raise questions concerning (1) eugenic traces in assisted reproductive technology ("Flesh Machine"—both the book (published by Autonomedia) and the performance project); (2) extreme medical intervention in reproduction and the attack on sexuality ("Society for Reproductive Anachronisms"); (3) the acquisition of "fit" flesh materials ("Intelligent Sperm On-line"); and (4) the utopian promissory rhetoric spinning off of the Human Genome Project ("Cult of the New Eve"). The most recent project is one that CAE began to investigate in the "Cult of the New Eve," and that is the politics of transgenics. What the collective is exploring in particular is the relationship between transgenic production and biological environmental resource management.

MR: Could you talk a little about this project and specifically explain the significance of the concepts of transgenic production and biological environmental resource management?

CAE: Transgenic engineering is the formation of new combinations of genes by isolating one or more genes from one or more organisms and introducing them into another organism. It was once believed that species boundaries were, for the most part, impenetrable. Now, all bets are off. Any species or combination of species can be combined with any other (although the limits of these recombinations are still unknown). Once the genomes of all the species are mapped and sequenced, and this information becomes readable, highly functional organisms can be created

to suit the needs of the institutions or states that create them (hence the huge investments from both public and private sectors in various genome projects). Biological environmental resource management is mainly concerned with introducing species particular to one ecosystem into another ecosystem, in an intentional attempt to preserve or to reclaim a desired version of ecological equilibrium. The problems with this method are clear from the beginning. How is equilibrium defined? What is a desirable ecosystem? The ideological repercussions are overwhelming. Be that as it may, the method has been used for over one hundred years. There have been successes and disasters, although the disasters tend to get more press—kudzu, cane toads, etc. With transgenics, the possibilities for new species introduction grow exponentially. Resource managers are no longer limited to the catalogue of life as it existed in the past, but can create a nearly infinite amount of recombinations (eventually with very specialized characteristics) from this catalogue. New organisms are already being made on a daily basis using transgenic processes. The question of what can be made and what happens when these creatures are released is of central importance to all specializations concerned with the environment.

Indeed, the commodities market is already testing the possibilities by releasing transgenic bacteria, farm animals, and plants into the ecosystem. This form of testing and of biological environmental resource management is a relatively gray area. The possibilities are both utopic and dystopic, but public mistrust of transgenics makes public discourse on the subject all the more difficult. To complicate this situation further, capital is in the midst of an ideologically schizophrenic moment. On the one hand, the ideology of transgenics (the mixing of categories) has traditionally been used as a means to mark the other and justify colonization. Colonial subjects have been considered dangerous because of the high value placed on transformation and mixing of natural constellations, which, to the western colonial mind, shows them to be out of harmony with the law of nature (according to which species can only combine with like species). To be sure, such activity in western mythology results in making of monsters in the most extreme sense—vampires, werewolves, and witches. Not to mention that the territory of the other, like hell itself, has historically been sprinkled with projected fantasies of horrific recombinant creatures (harpies, sea monsters, cyclops, etc.) that are abhorrent to nature. Yet, now that this law of nature (like with like; species with species) has been reduced to a simple boundary to be crossed for profit, capital has to produce a kind of double think that maintains colonial signifiers but allows the recombinant to be accepted in everyday life. Now that this new organic realm is open for invasion, centuries of ideological signage have to be re-engineered. The sharply divided opinions about transgenic food are indicative of the problem. On one hand, the traditional transgenics fears sweep through the general public, and on the other hand, those concerned with maximizing profit in food resources are building data that show that transgenic food is neither a health hazard nor an ecological threat. This battle between the dystopian/utopian form of representing these new initiatives is the perfect dramatic friction for a theater of transgenics, and biological environmental resource management is one key discipline where material conditions will play themselves out in the extreme.

MR: One thing that I've noticed frequently in CAE's writings is the examination of our (U.S. mainstream) culture's focus on the spectacular and unusual when it comes to death and memorialization. The group seems to like using Greg Ulmer's concept of a memorial for automobile deaths as an opposing point of focus. This seems to me to suggest an attempt to do something not often done in "activist" art practices (Adbusters, etc.), which is mainly addressing latent desire(s) behind the mundane acts of living, along with being critical of the actions themselves.

CAE: Nonrational economy, or the under-economy, has always been of primary concern for CAE, considering that capitalism has an immense stake in limiting the scope of desire to work and commodity relations. The task of trying to productively agitate the nonrational is by far the most difficult because it is where organizational and analytic abilities are of modest use in insuring successful actions. The standard tendency of cultural and political activist practices to react and counter a given activity that reinforces or expands dominant social hierarchies with a strategic or a tactical initiative (logos opposed by antilogos) will not work in the realm of the nonrational. All we can ask in such a case is what we can do to create conduits into territories of visibility where repressed/invisible desires can find public expression. When done successfully, such expressions can introduce a productive level of chaos into society (usually at a micro level), which, in turn, offers organized (rational) movements or activities a more liquid space to act effectively. In other words, the political chess match between oppositional forces does not have to follow standard patterns of interaction. While this narrative sounds good in theory, the problem is that there is no way to know who will benefit or what the final result of agitating the nonrational may be. It's a real roll of the dice that can have as disastrous (authoritarian) consequences as it can have good (liberationist). However, given the current situation, resistant forces have little to lose by working in this arena.

MR: Does CAE see the "us/them" dichotomy common to many oppostional camps problematic? If so, what theories/practices do you use to not fall into that trap, while remaining actively critical?

CAE: That really depends on the situation. For example, CAE is in favor of what we term "tactical essentialism." When this is employed, people can successfully use universal binaries to establish the social solidarity that can, in turn, produce a resistant movement. It has been used well in the past by the Women's Liberation Movement or the Black Power Movement. However, this choice is tactical, meaning that it must be surrendered once the movement has been established. If resistant vectors are to continue to increase in mass and velocity, they must then establish more complex critiques and actions that recognize the inconsistencies, aporia, and gray areas involved in separation.

CAE's main principle for not falling into the binary trap is our use of tacticality. Obviously, this is a very long discussion that goes beyond the limits of this interview, but here is the short version. The five principles of tactical media are: specificity (deriving content and choosing media based on the specific needs of a given audience within their everyday life context); nomadicality (a willingness to address any situation and to move to any site); amateurism (a willingness to try anything or, negatively put, to resist specialization); deterritorialization (an occupation of space that is predicated upon its surrender, or anti-monumentalism); and coun-

terinduction (a recognition that all knowledge systems have limits and internal contradictions, and that all knowledge systems can have explanatory power in the right context, and that contradiction in general is productive). Our practice is about process only—the process of resistance. We have no final cause in mind, no utopias, and no solid social categories. CAE interacts with the becomings of lived time in an effort to expand difference.

MR: I don't want to naturalize technology here, but what does CAE make of certain trends in technology that seem to favor more democratic (less specialized) forms of communication and commerce (shareware, Linux) as opposed to the more dominant forms of private property and intellectual property rights? How is biotech connected to these changes?

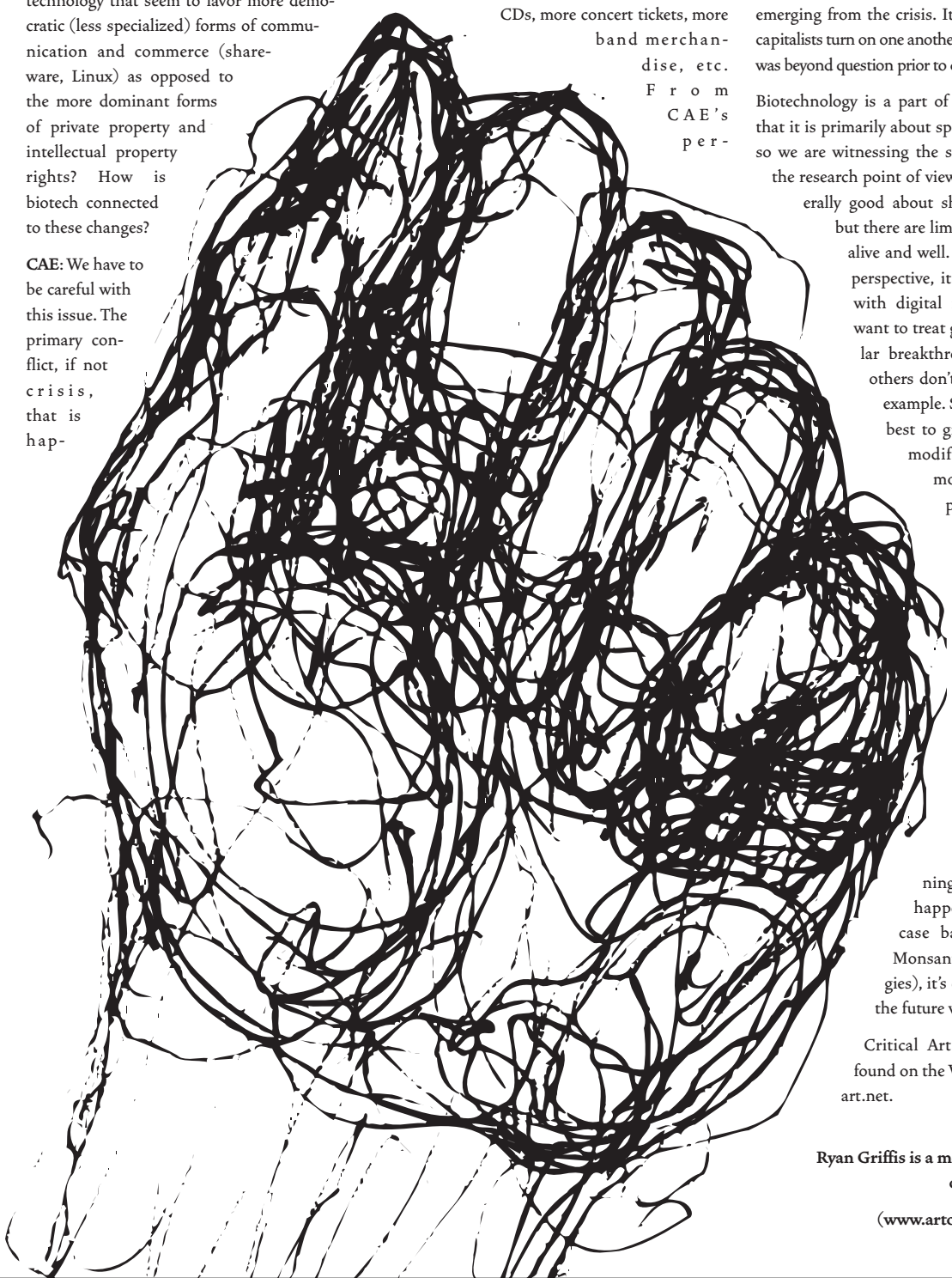
CAE: We have to be careful with this issue. The primary conflict, if not crisis, that is happening within capitalist economy concerns how digital economic power should be configured and consolidated. Currently, capital is split. On one hand, there are those who believe that profits can be maximized by doing away with older notions of property. From this perspective, in an economy based on replication, the only thing that matters in terms of profit generation is the speed of replication. The faster information is replicated and thereby consumed, the higher the profits in analogue economy. For example, if a company gives away free music on Napster, that company will in turn sell more CDs, more concert tickets, more band merchandise, etc. From CAE's perspective, this is the position that will eventually become dominant because it is a digital strategy. On the other hand, many still believe that digital products should be governed under the same property principles as analogue products (traditional privatization). The struggle within capital is intense on this issue. Whichever way it goes, the public is not going to win. Capital will only tighten its hold on digital economy. The good side is that during these conflicts it's possible for actual anti-capital initiatives to accomplish more by camouflaging themselves with this discourse and reaping benefit from the confusion emerging from the crisis. It's so nice when the capitalists turn on one another over a principle that was beyond question prior to digital economy.

Biotechnology is a part of digital economy in that it is primarily about speed and replication, so we are witnessing the same struggle. From the research point of view, scientists are generally good about sharing information, but there are limits. Patenting is still alive and well. From the corporate perspective, it's the same split as with digital information. Some want to treat genetic and molecular breakthroughs as analogic, others don't. Take GM food for example. Some argue that it is best to give away genetically modified seeds (a common occurrence in postcolonial food initiatives in the third world). The belief is that once food production is cornered from the molecular level up, that profits from other related goods and services will increase. Others want payment from the beginning. Since much of this happens on a case-by-case basis (for example, Monsanto uses both strategies), it's difficult to tell what the future will bring. ◀◀

Critical Art Ensemble can be found on the Web at www.critical-art.net.

Ryan Griffis is a member of artofficial construction media

(www.artofficial-online.com)



by Dave Bailey

Perhaps the results surprised a few people. On December 15th, and the so-called "Union Stagehands"—actually state troopers—who had infiltrated the puppet-making warehouse could only identify a single one of us whom they had arrested as being traceable to any crime. This individual was "Stinky," a member of the Clown Bloc, whom they had propositioned more than once and sexually harassed when she told them where they ought to stick their shit. Their targeting of her was highly dubious at best, and the District Attorney (DA) dropped all the charges against the remaining 35 of us.

Back on August 1st, the planned day of action and civil disobedience against the Criminal Injustice System, at 2:05 p.m., three police officers approached the door of the warehouse on the corner of 41st and Haverford. Inside the warehouse, we had made over 300 puppets to get the message out to the Republicans who had infested Philadelphia for their rank and vile National Convention. Our puppets would never see the streets, much less the light of day. Rather, they saw only the insides of one of three trash compactors before being crushed to death. 180 police officers surrounded the warehouse that day, aided by three helicopters, to insure that the 75 of us who had locked ourselves inside would not get our message into Center City. It was a well-choreographed, highly effective preemptive strike to silence the message of the protesters. (See "Subversive Criminal Puppeteers," MediaReader, Issue #3)

From inside a maximum-security prison, I watched a television broadcast on the demonstrations, vaguely making out the newscaster saying how we had no clear message.

For months afterwards, I traveled back and forth from Chicago to Philly, stopping long enough in Chicago to put on a fresh pair of socks. I managed to find some work in Philadelphia making puppets and pageants. I attended some of the motions to dismiss our cases and was befuddled and scared when I witnessed the tenacity with which the city pursued our cases, trying so very desperately to convict us. At the time of my writing this, their heated felony cases have slowly fallen apart, with not one felony conviction yet!

So now it is over. The Haverford 75's trials are finished, and we have begun the process of filing civil suits. It has been a struggle to glean the meaning of all of this; many of us who were arrested inside the warehouse are full-time puppeteers. Where does all of this leave the Puppetista now? I have watched as puppets and the cirkus arts have slowly become defined as criminal by the power holders, and watched, too, as activists turn tail and hide from puppet makers, scared of experiencing a repeat of what happened in Philly. It has been a hard lesson to learn. More and more people have been saying, "Make some street theatre where you are and bring it to the event," which prevents us from meeting and working with others, improving our skills, and strengthening the move away from corporate power.

It is a terrible lesson, one that draws a line between street performer and audience: performers make the theatre; protesters watch the theatre. Few non-performers will have the chance to participate. Yet, this is how many have interpreted and distilled the events in Philadelphia. August 1st: the day street theatre was told by the system to go underground, and obeyed. ◂◂

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROPAGANDHI

Propagandhi is a political punk band from Winnipeg, Canada whose members are activist, record label operators, and general firestarters. Al Burian conducted the following interview at the Congress Theater in Chicago during the bands April 2001 tour.

MR: To start with, I wanted to quote you from your new record: "Success: the ability to perform within the framework of obedience." Considering the size of this theatre, and knowing that this theatre will be at least three-quarters full for your show tonight, by even very mainstream romanticized standards of rock music success, you guys are successful. So, by your own definition, do you feel that you're performing within a framework of obedience?

P: I think we're talking about different degrees of success, first of all. In some ways you can say we're successful: we're able to sustain the band at a certain level. But we don't get pats on the head from the establishment or cultural icons, or from mainstream media at all. And for us, not just being involved in a band and the music scene but also in a record label, we see how people operate to try to get those pats on the head from the establishment and to try to take the path of least resistance to success. That's what I think those lyrics mean. For us, musically and lyrically, we're honestly doing and saying what we believe, and sometimes people are ambivalent about it, but a lot of times they're hostile about it. I think a lot of bands avoid any confrontation no matter what they believe. They don't bring it from their heart for fear of impeding their progress.

MR: Whereas you're actually a pretty confrontational band...

P: Not confrontational, but we hope that our lyrics and the content of our records create more potential for somebody to be hostile towards the ideas in this culture. It's not like we're tailoring our ideas to make sure we'll be able to play certain tours or play to a certain amount of people or sell a certain amount of records. In fact, that song was written while I was honestly wondering about the cultural climate that we're living in now, much of which I think is just shit music and meaningless lyrics, wondering if there can be any relevance for us or if it should be totally ignored.

Relating to more conventional ideas of success and all that, I think a lot of the mainstreaming of punk rock in the early 90s, like Nirvana and Green Day, has

SINCE THOSE PEOPLE ARE THERE, WHY NOT TRY TO POPULARIZE RADICAL POLITICAL IDEAS INSTEAD OF KEEPING THEM UNDERGROUND? ULTIMATELY, THE GOAL IS TO SPREAD THESE IDEAS.

PROPAGANDHI

Interview by Al Burian

WE'RE NOT GOING TO SIGN TO SONY, EVER, BUT I TOTALLY VALUE THE FACT THAT RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE EXISTED OR EXISTS, AND WERE DOING WHAT THEY WERE DOING.

really brought us up being more of a spectacle that a participatory thing. Just with the sheer numbers of people being interested in this type of stuff after being exposed to it through more conventional corporate media outlets, we approach it by saying: "Look, since those people are there, why not try to popularize radical political ideas instead of keeping them underground?" Ultimately, the goal is to spread these ideas and not just keep them as a 'safe' or subcultural idea, or preach to the converted.

MR: You're saying you're not getting pats on the head from the establishment, but, on a broader level, a lot of people like you, you have a popular, well-respected band and record label. To a certain extent you are compromising your ideas, but in some ways you're compromising your ideas as soon as you even package your ideas on a demo tape.

P: In terms of commodification and selling things that other people are profiting off of, there are a lot of compromises. I think that's just an ongoing thing that has to be revisited from time to time. Say 5-10 years ago, there were lots of indy record stores in North America. Now the chains have gauged them all. So, what's the alternative? To not go along with the whole mainstream process by just basically selling demo tapes out of your house, or do you allow certain distributors access to your stuff to get the word out?

MR: Is there an artistic middle ground?

P: It's dependent on many factors, even the personalities of certain bands: what they're willing to do or how hard they're willing to work. We're not going to sign to Sony, ever, but I totally value the fact that Rage Against the Machine existed or exists, and were doing what they were doing.

Ultimately, there has to be a multi-level unit providing access to and popularizing this stuff.

Anybody born into the framework of the capitalists who grows to be anti-capitalist is living in a compromise. I'm sure I'm a living contradiction, so unless you're out of the city, living in a hut and growing your own food and all that type of stuff, you're going to have to face this type of thing.

MR: In terms of where you draw the line, in the FAQ section on your CD-ROM, your reply to "Why are you on Fat Wreck Chords?" was "Because we are." I'm getting the sense that you don't like to be asked that question and are sick of the whole...

P: It is a sickening question because there is an abstract line drawn between art and the rest of real life that doesn't make any sense where people will point and say "You're on Fat Wreck Chords" while they're eating at McDonald's. It's just abstract and meaningless to me at this point.

People should be critical of these types of things, but it shouldn't be about keeping score of who has less connections to capitalism. It should be more about who is moving ahead the cause towards rethinking economics in favor of people...

...figuring out workable replacements to the current system or actually pointing out the real enemy instead of having this side game that people keep score on. Let's start thinking about the shit that's really happening and directing our energies towards real strategies.

MR: I actually brought in a quote from I Spy that I thought was interesting in that context: "I'll be dead and fucking gone before my music is bought and sold just like appliances and cars."

P: But it means with no heart, no ideas, no message. Just distraction propaganda for the masses and consumer culture instead of actually putting competing ideas up to people who have been denied them since they were born.

I think a lot of major label music is, in some ways, simply a function of the existing order of things. Historically, anything that is original ultimately becomes commodified, consciously or subconsciously. But aside from making money off of it, it becomes disassociated from its original cultural context and from the ideas and soul of the music. I don't know much about jazz music, but it's certainly happened with rock and roll, hip hop, punk rock; it's disgusting to see.

MR: Apart from the ethical implications, choosing a record label is a marketing decision. You have the power to do what you want with your band and you're making the decision to reach a certain audience. When your first record came out, I thought it was a good idea: a band that is a Fat Wreck Chords type of band but is representing different points of views to people who otherwise would basically come into contact with a lot of bands that discuss no politics or express fairly misogynist viewpoints. A theme in your music is being disappointed with your audience, being frustrated by the chicken-shit conformance or by the people who tell you to shut up when you're explaining what the song's about. But you are gearing your band towards these people on purpose. Is that where you want to be?

P: Yes. We were the kids who, when we were 15, were at shows not paying attention to all the words and were diving on people's heads and that kind of thing. As

THE U.S. IS BY FAR THE BEST CASE STUDY FOR THINKING ABOUT HOW CONCENTRATIONS OF POWER USE ANTI-DEMOCRATIC METHODS TO RETAIN POWER.

time went on, things sunk in. I think we were radicalized by music and we weren't just sent out the door because we didn't behave properly or didn't learn quickly enough. People learn at different speeds at different times in their lives. I think we all been through that in the past and I think we should at least extend that courtesy to the younger people at our shows. Sometimes we lash out in songs a bit, venting against the ignorance of the society where we are bred. But the rest of the record is just putting ideas out there in what I think is a really positive sense to try to allow for people to actually contextualize the lyrics and the record themselves. Maybe a younger person will take the ideas to heart after a while, or at least consider them. We try to introduce people to the ideas and show people that there are well-established resistance groups all over the United States and Canada and the world, and it's not a total cultural vacuum because this stuff exists and it exists outside of punk rock.

MR: How old are you guys?

P: 27. 30. 27. 30.

MR: Someone tried to kick my ass one time because of your band. I worked at a copy store with this guy who was in a popular local Oi! band and we had this weird tacit musical war going on where he brought in all the stuff he was into one day. The next day I brought in a bunch of CDs, one of which was the Propagandhi/I Spy split: "I'd rather be flag burning." Which I thought was funny, but never really thought of as offending somebody, but this guy got really mad. But then he realized you were Canadian...

P: See, that's what Americans think: that they have the only flag on Earth.

MR: But the cover motif of your new record is the American flag.

P: And that's the other thing. Canada is not its own country: It's basically the stink of the U.S. It's owned and operated by the U.S. Besides that, Canada's history is not something that we want to endorse in any way; it's genocidal, colonialist, nationalist—everything we're trying to educate people about.

MR: Don't you think that if you put the Canadian flag on the cover and you delivered the same criticism...

P: The U.S. is the superpower, the only one. Canada is a nation of 30 million people that is essentially used for resources by multi-national corporations. It's just a carved up piece of land that's being exploited.

If you go to Canada, it's all American companies. And that's how the world is. That's the idea of the record.

MR: Although in Canada, from the American point of view, at least you have a heath care system.

P: But it's being disassembled right now, actively. We're living in a time of rapid privatization of everything. We live in Canada under an American context at this point. The U.S. is by far the best case study for thinking about how concentrations of power use anti-Democratic methods to retain power. You can take the U.S. and apply it as a template to places like Canada and Britain and France, and get the same fucking product: concentration of power means gain of power by fucking with people. Americans are not aberrations. When Western industrial powers act in ways that are completely unlawful or undemocratic towards the citizens or people abroad, you've got to understand: they're not an aberration, they're atoms that are part of the structure. And if people can understand that, then we can start working for something new; actually for democracy.

MR: I wanted to talk a little bit about how you got to where you guys are with your playing. You were saying that you were stage-diving 15 year-olds, but what gave you all your current politics?

P: For me, it was being interested in music at a very early age. And then my musical interests eventually got me into being exposed to political music, and then through a very long general process over five to seven years, I slowly began understanding politics... finally. And then, that just became my life's interest.

For me it was speed metal bands and stuff like that. I remember thinking "this music sounds awesome, but what the fuck are they talking about? It's nonsense." But eventually it started to sink in and made sense.

And for me, I like the lyrics of all those bands, but I never got any of records that I

thought had bad lyrics, like all the NDC and them. But when I got M.O.D. records, I looked at the lyrics and those M.O.D. records were just the fucking funniest things. But then you just get older and you start being sick of feeling like a goof for what you're saying all the time. Eventually you just start to realize...this is what everyone's talking about.

MR: So, you started your record label, G-7, in the space between your last record and this new one?

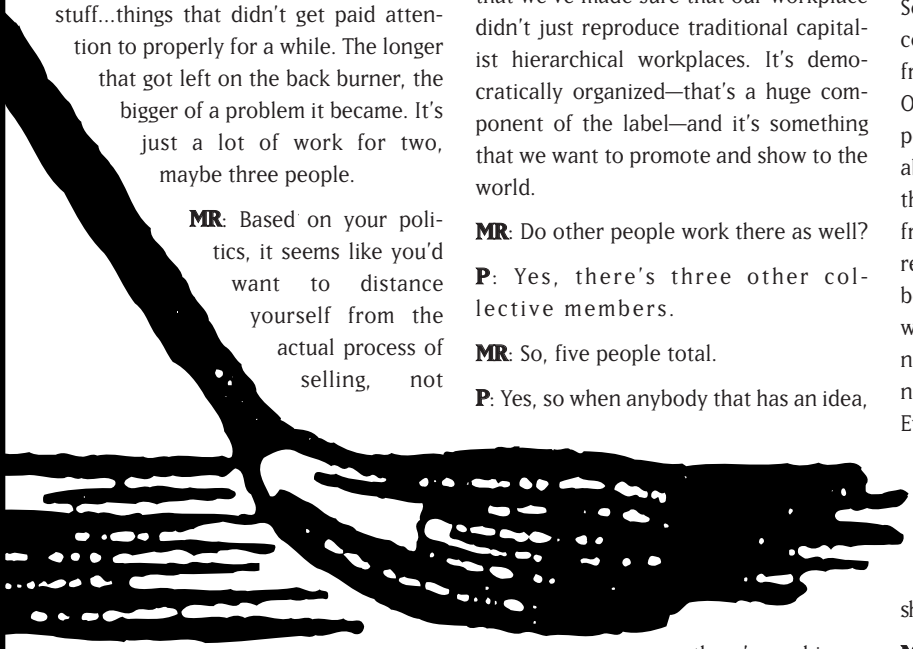
P: It took a long time to get it going. We basically got home from one of our tours and started it, but then it was like two and a half years before we really started to work on the new record.

MR: Do you do distribution as well?

BUT THE UNFORTUNATE REALITY THAT WE LIVE IN IS THAT YOU BASICALLY HAVE TO COVER YOUR OWN ASS OR YOU'RE GOING TO GET FUCKED.

P: Very, very little distribution. After we'd established it to a certain point, we realized there's all this other stuff you've got to take care of properly, like operating it under a capitalist framework: paying taxes and accounting and all that kind of stuff...things that didn't get paid attention to properly for a while. The longer that got left on the back burner, the bigger of a problem it became. It's just a lot of work for two, maybe three people.

MR: Based on your politics, it seems like you'd want to distance yourself from the actual process of selling, not start a record label and sell music. It also seems like you'd want to put out your own music if you were going to take that step.



P: Yeah, I think the parts of the label that have been hardest to deal with have been getting down to the numbers: calling people up to say "you owe us money," and dealing with that kind of stuff. But the unfortunate reality that we live in is that you basically have to cover your own ass or you're going to get fucked. We've been ripped off numerous times: certain people who we'd been supporting by having them sell our records have gone out of business and we get nothing in return. Trying to stay on top of that kind of stuff and accounting has always been a real hassle because its something that we're really not interested in doing. We've never taken the time to go to business schools or school or anything like that. So yes, the idea of just getting the stuff out there is, I think, the most appealing thing. And dealing with all that other stuff is just like, fuck...

The one difference, I think, between our label and other labels or workplaces is that we've made sure that our workplace didn't just reproduce traditional capitalist hierarchical workplaces. It's democratically organized—that's a huge component of the label—and it's something that we want to promote and show to the world.

MR: Do other people work there as well?

P: Yes, there's three other collective members.

MR: So, five people total.

P: Yes, so when anybody that has an idea, there's no hierarchy at all.

MR: Is everyone paid to work there?

P: Everyone's paid.

MR: Is everyone paid equally? And do you guys pay yourselves, I would assume?

P: Yes. And everyone shares in the lesser...

...menial tasks.

And conceptual tasks.

And again they pay the bands fair wages, of course.

MR: But owning a record label... doesn't it seem like it makes more sense to you to put out your own records?

P: We do, in Canada.

The thing is, if we can jump back to the early part of the discussion, when we got together with Fat Wreck Chords originally, it surely wasn't a marketing decision. They only had one 7" out by Lagwagon. Ebullition wouldn't touch us with a 10 foot pole.

We hadn't put out any albums thus far.

So we said, "OK, we'll do this." And it continued from there, and an actual friendship developed between us. Obviously, ultimately, if we sat with the people at Fat over drinks, and talked about workplace structure or economy, there'd be an argument. But, they're our friends, and we could have just put records out ourselves, but we just don't believe in turning our backs on people who've helped us out, been nice to us for nine years. But in Canada we put out our new record and we put out a comp. Eventually, I'm sure it will move to that more and more.

MR: How long have you been on tour?

P: Just two days. This is literally our fourth show in the last three and a half years.

MR: How was the first show?

P: Technical difficulties galore...

(laughter)

...but I think we overcame.

MR: Where was it?

P: Greenbay.

MR: The whole tour is a package tour, right?

P: Yes, with Fat Wreck Chords.

This is by far the most regimented tour, even after just two days, I can tell: this is the most regimented tour we're ever going to be on in our lives.

MR: In terms of sound checks and...?

P: Everything. Like the level of professionalism of a band like Avail is kind of stunning and overwhelming. But I'm sure we'll get into the groove of how all these bands work, and get to shows on time and all that kind of stuff. (laughter)

THE ONE DIFFERENCE, I THINK, BETWEEN OUR LABEL AND OTHER LABELS OR WORKPLACES IS THAT WE'VE MADE SURE THAT OUR WORKPLACE DIDN'T JUST REPRODUCE TRADITIONAL CAPITALIST HIERARCHICAL WORKPLACES.

MR: OK, I have one more question. I'm just curious, actually, whether you're still talking a lot between songs.

P: It's hard, two days in, it's hard to tell if we should be or shouldn't be. But when I look back on a lot of that stuff, I see that my talking made more enemies than it produced a circle of allies, at points. Either because I'm not very good at saying things, or just because the things I was saying were purposely trying to provoke people. I don't know. But the less the three of us idiots go near the mike, possibly the better. (laughter)

I think we're good at putting together lyrics and songs, and now I think we're getting good at drawing in people who can help contextualize those. I really like our work in that department, but I don't like our work outside of the playing live...

Which is why we try to have access for activist groups to come to tables at shows. We have a very thorough book table that's traveling with us to all the shows, and actually did really well in Greenbay last night. There were a lot of kids buying really cool stuff.

Which is good if you take a look at how it was last time, where there was less people, but talking every song, and then no one was buying anything.

I guess if you want to be intense, you should filter it over people who do that full time and that's their imperative.

There's probably lots of people who actually spend time doing that, and the worst thing to do would be to misrepresent your ideas, or, even worse, someone else's ideas. So, if you can do it best in a song or on paper, then fucking shut the hell up.

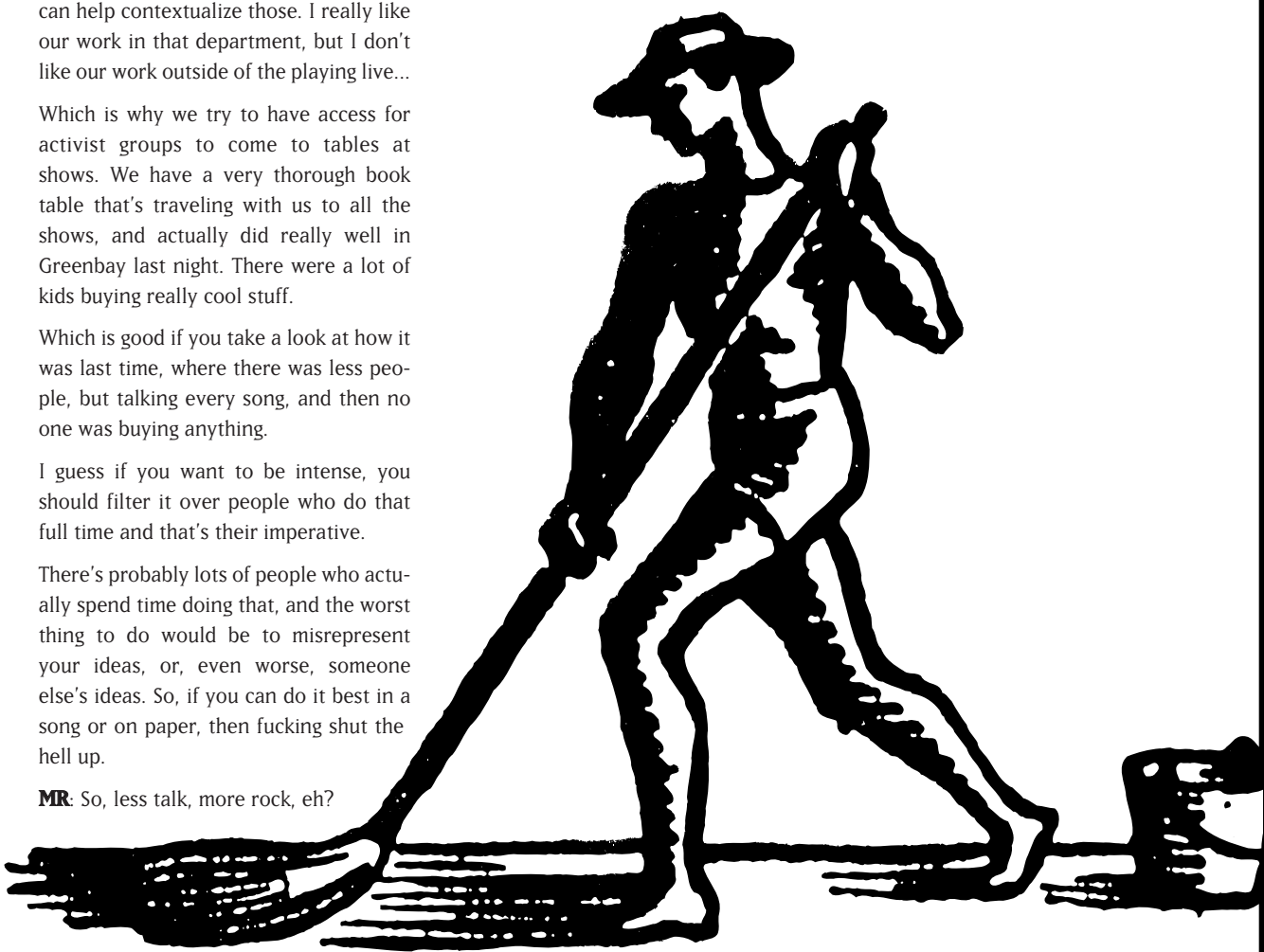
MR: So, less talk, more rock, eh?

Yeah.

(laughter)

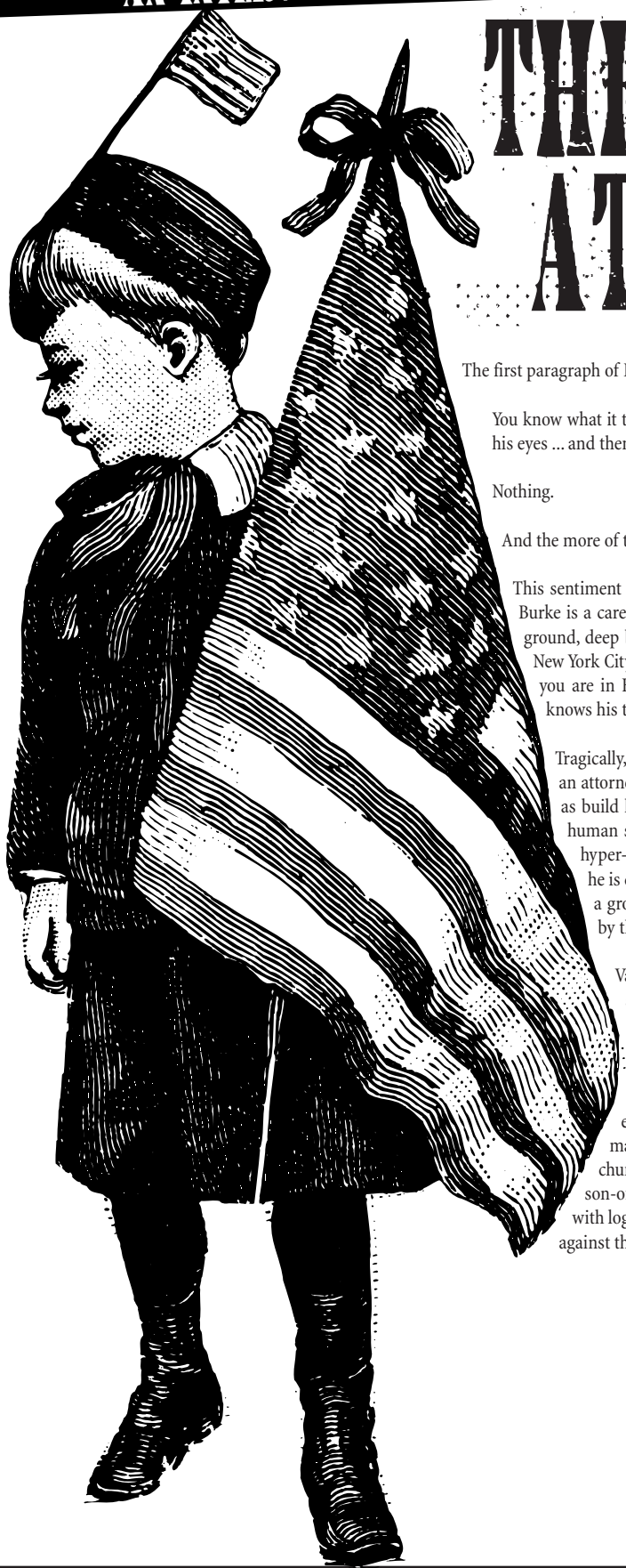
MR: Well, thanks a lot. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

P: I'd like to give a plug to ZNET (www.lbbs.org). It's probably, in my humble opinion, the best source of progressive activism on the Internet. ◀◀



AN INTERVIEW WITH CHILDREN'S ATTORNEY ANDREW VACHSS

THE WAR AT HOME



The first paragraph of Dead and Gone, the new novel by Andrew Vachss, reads like this:

> You know what it takes to sit across the table from a man, listen to him talk, look into his eyes ... and then blow his brains all over the wallpaper?
>
> Nothing.
>
> And the more of that you have, the easier it is.

This sentiment belongs to Burke, ex-con and Vachss' protagonist of twelve novels. Burke is a career criminal who moonlights as an investigator. He operates underground, deep below the radar of the 'legitimate' world. Touring the underside of New York City with Burke is like having your blindfold torn off and realizing that you are in Hell, surrounded by pimps, junkies, pedophiles, and killers. Burke knows his turf well. So does Vachss.

Tragically, these fictional accounts don't contain a great deal of fiction. Vachss, an attorney who represents children exclusively, didn't so much create Burke, as build him from parts discovered in a very real, very endless junkyard of human suffering. Burke is the quintessential abused child. He is paranoid, hyper-vigilant and capable of explosive violence. The only human bonding he is capable of is the very conditional love he has for his family of choice, a group of seemingly mismatched outcasts who, like Burke, were raised by the state and by the streets. Vachss knows his clients well.

Vachss has been a federal investigator in sexually transmitted diseases and a warden in a maximum-security prison for violent youth. For decades he has represented children against their abusers, in courtrooms, on lecture circuits, in the media and in his fiction. The novels, though gripping and suspenseful, are not written purely to entertain you while you are waiting for the bus. They are written to enrage you, to infuriate you, to engage you in a war against the ultimate human injustice. Anger is the fuel that keeps the Vachss machine churning. If your own clinical diagnosis of a child molester is evil, rotten son-of-a-bitch, then Vachss is your man. His ability to temper this anger with logic and compassion is something to be aspired to for anyone fighting against the injustices they deplore. Andrew Vachss is an effective man.

Interview by Trey Bundy

Originally posted at Fat Free Radio, December 4, 2000

SO IF YOU´RE IN PRISON FOR EXAMPLE, THERE ARE A LOT OF DIFFERENT PLACES BUT NONE OF THEM ARE CALLED SWITZERLAND, YOU KNOW.? THERE IS NO NEUTRAL TERRITORY YOU CAN RETREAT TO.

MR: How do you define the term "child abuse"?

Andrew Vachss: I don't even like the term. It's too generic. So what I do is break "child abuse" into three broad categories. The first one and the largest one is some form of inadequacy. People who don't know how to be parents. Maybe they were raised with a slap in the mouth every time they did something wrong. They think they turned out fine and they want their kids to be even better and they use the same method. Maybe they think telling their kids "you're bad", "you're dumb", "you're ugly", "you're stupid" is motivation. Maybe they don't understand basic fundamentals about how their child needs to bond with them. Maybe they're impaired by drugs. Maybe they're impaired by alcohol. Maybe they're impaired, as people certainly are, by poverty.

MR: And these are people who can become good parents?

AV: Exactly right. In the broad category we're on, the most important characteristic of all of them is that these are people tremendously amenable to what citizens call rehabilitation, okay? We get an enormous bang to the buck working with such folks, and overwhelmingly the answer is yes.

The second category is people who are crazy and I mean clinically insane. I don't mean some 'Oprah' version of crazy, people who howl at the moon. People whose reality testing is impaired, people who are deluded, people who are compelled, can they be [rehabilitated]? The answer is some yes, some no. It depends on the disorder. We have not been successful getting paranoid schizophrenics to parent safely. We've been very successful with obsessive-compulsives.

MR Why?

AV: Because medication seems to have a real impact on such people without costing them what it cost others. The third category is where I part company with social workers and that's people who are evil, people who hurt children for their own pleasure and/or their own profit. And the answer to "can anything be done with them?" is no.

MR: Period.

AV: Period. That's right. Their conduct is volitional. It's not ignorant. It's not insane. It's a choice. Can you alter their choices? No, you really can't. You can respond to their choices. But you're not going to change the way they choose to access children.

MR: Right. Because they like what they do and they're going to do it.

AV: That's right, they like what they do. You can deter them. You can incapacitate them. But you can't alter them.

MR: Of the ways in which people hurt children, physically, sexually and emotionally, which do you consider the most damaging?

AV: I don't like [to say] most damaging, but in terms of long-term effect on the personality of the individual, my best surmise would be emotional abuse. It seems to scar the deepest, it seems to affect one's self perception the most, and it is inarguable that among major predators we will see emotional abuse, failure to bond, pervasive neglect, more than we will see any other type of abuse.

MR: Well let's talk about predators. How do predators choose their prey? Can they spot an unloved, unbonded child?

AV: The answer to your second question is absolutely yes. At least the more highly evolved predators, the more successful predators. Because camouflage is their major weapon yet they can't invest in moving on children without some high probability of success because the whole engagement process is long. They're going to invest months, minimum.

MR: So quite often it's parents, teachers, neighbors ...

AV: Of course. They're already in. They're already inside the circle of trust. That's exactly right. It's relatively rare though it certainly happens, it's relatively rare for the guy in the ski mask in the van to jump out, grab the kid and take off. I'm not saying that's not a danger. I'm not saying we shouldn't be aware of it and be able to respond to it. But most kids who are in danger in this country are in danger inside the circle of trust, not outside.

MR: Do you think that a human being raised, never having bonded with a family will ever be able to bond or relate comfortably with others?

AV: It depends on whether they can get it from some other place. That's probably the single greatest determinant of how their life is going to be, if they can get what they didn't get from their biological family elsewhere. If they cannot they generally spend the rest of their lives seeking it. Some seek it to their own pain. They're constantly being used and abused by others. Some seek it out of the pain of others.

MR: Well then, let's talk about Burke for a moment. He has chosen a family and they have chosen him. In fact they've all chosen each other. But Burke still lives in a constant state of fear and distrust.

AV: Yes. But not fear of his family and not distrust of his family. But of the world as he perceives it, sure.

MR: And do you think it will always be that way for him?

AV: For him yes, no question. For others, you know, they take sort of steps. [For example:] I learn to trust you, so okay maybe not all people are bad. I might expand that, I might not. It really depends on the experiences I have after I get past that first hurdle.

MR: So it's totally individualized.

AV: I think it's very, very individualized.

MR: Let's stay on Burke. He and his crew commit acts of extreme violence against their enemies but not randomly or without deliberation. So what is the critical point at which they decide to inflict damage?

AV: They are human organisms. So if given the opportunity to choose from a menu of which violence is one option, they might choose that, they might not. Under stress the menu doesn't pop up. Just your reactions pop up.

MR: Is this impulsive? They don't seem like an impulsive group.

AV: It's not impulsive. It's reactive. So they're not an impulsive group. They prefer to operate off of a professional criminal mentality. There are times when those options don't exist, okay? So if you're in prison for example, there are a lot of different places but none of them are called Switzerland, you know? There is no neutral territory you can retreat to. And so there

SOMETHING I SAID MANY, MANY YEARS AGO THAT´S REALLY STARTING TO PENETRATE IS THAT THE WORD FAMILY SHOULD BE DEFINED OPERATIONALLY, NOT BIOLOGICALLY.

are situations where you don't have time to think it through and you are not given the opportunity to think it through. And in a self-defense mode you can be very, very violent. Sometimes self-defense is pre-emptive. In other words, if I think you are going to hurt me, why would I wait?

It's not impulsive in the sense that they are giving in to an urge, okay? If somebody is shooting at you the best option is to leave if you can, right? But it's happening. You can't just sit there, "can I leave? What are the options?" Your instinct is ...

MR: To shoot first.

AV: Sure, if you can, but certainly to shoot back. It may not in retrospect have been your best play. To some extent your adrenaline takes over, your emotions take over and fear takes over. People attack more out of fear than any single thing I can think of.

(In the novels, when Burke reaches a point at which it is too difficult to solve a set of problems with his conscious mind, he will occasionally focus his eyes on a small red dot. He then breathes rhythmically and concentrates on the dot until it grows outside his field of vision and its edges disappear. In this place he is sometimes able to access new solutions.)

MR: Next question. Do you have a red dot on a wall in your house?

AV: On a mirror.

MR: On a mirror.

AV: Yeah, not on a wall. It won't work on a wall.

MR: Do you use it?

AV: I have.

MR: How often?

AV: When necessary, because it's not a ritual. If you're looking for answers, and you know a particular path that works, you go down that path when you're looking for answers. It's not a habit.

MR: What kind of answers can you find there that you can't find other places?

AV: Any answers that require you to step away from your emotions. Your emotions get in the way of your thinking. Everybody's emotions get in the way of their thinking. When you want to look at something without any emotional content at all, that's when you would go there. When you're so pounded by other forces that if you try and concentrate they impinge, then you want to get away from them.

MR: Is this something you've been able to do for a long time?

AV: For a very, very long time. But I'm not a kid.

MR: Was it shown to you or did you teach yourself?

AV: No, I actually learned it I guess the way most people do, by accident. You concentrate on something so hard that the next thing you know hours have gone by and yet you've got answers to what you were looking for. It's just going to another place. A nice word for it is dissociation. For people who can control it there are many benefits to it. There are people who can't control it, who dissociate not of their own free will.

MR: Let's talk about what happens to kids after they are removed from their abusive homes. What's wrong with the foster care system and why do kids rot in group homes?

AV: What's wrong with the foster care system is that we haven't professionalized foster care. So we see it as a warehouse, not as part of the continuing care given to children. So foster parents are paid simply to house and feed children. Not to participate in their healing. Not to help give them tools.

MR: And they're not trained to do it.

AV: If they were trained, they would not accept the [small amount of] money that they're given. It should be a profession. It should be another kind of social work. And we should have professionalized it many years ago.

MR: Well it's somewhat professionalized in group homes that exist where the objective is to act as an attachment model and teach these kids to function safely and comfortably as part of a family.

AV: If you could do that you've probably got your hand on the mystery of life.

MR: The magic button.

AV: Absolutely. I mean, so-called attachment disorders are present in every kind of sociopath you could want to see. Clearly if they could bond, if they did have a strong sense of empathy, they couldn't do what they do.

MR: In California more and more cases are ending up in reunification and more therapy is geared towards forgiveness. Are these trends related, and are there financial factors at work here?

AV: Look. Nobody wants to pay for legal services to a non-voting constituency. Nobody wants to pay for any services to a non-voting constituency. And the parents, our theoretical adversaries here, are a voting constituency. A child is never going to vote.

MR: So, because foster care is a service that requires financial resources, we teach these kids to forgive and send them back to their abusive homes.

AV: Sure.

MR: Is this the case everywhere?

AV: No. Actually reunification has come in disfavor under the people who were so strong on it for many, many years. I'm talking about social scientists, not independent advocates with an ax to grind. Something I said many, many years ago that's really starting to penetrate is that the word 'family' should be defined operationally, not biologically. Family reunification is based on biology, not operation; the entitlement is by blood, not by performance. So in my opinion, when you remove a child from parents there should be a discrete period. A year, eighteen months. If you can't return then you're terminated. And that's the reason kids are in foster care, because neither decision is made. Kids can't be returned and they don't terminate parental rights.

MR: So then how do we attack the problem of parents who repeatedly violate the conditions of their reunification and visitation privileges, and a system that affords them too many chances?

AV: This is where you need the third party representation. If the only parties in the game are the attorneys for the parents and the attorneys for the agencies, this situation you've described is going to be chronic. If the third party representing the child is then forcing the state to move forward on termination, on the grounds that they haven't met the terms and

I WOULDN´T WASTE THIRTY SECONDS OF MY LIFE ARGUING THAT THE 911-RESPONSE MODEL OF PROFESSIONALISM AND INSTANTANEOUSNESS AND GOAL ORIENTATION IS EXACTLY THE MODEL THAT WE SHOULD HAVE IN CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES.

conditions, you get much accelerated results. Both ways you get acceleration. You get termination faster, but you also get parents saying 'okay, now I get it, there really is a gun to my head'. So the third party representation is the key to that.

MR: Does this happen a lot?

AV: In New York state, in every case, by law.

MR: How many states are like New York?

AV: Not many. But most states have a provision by which it could happen. So my understanding is, in California the law is that a kid will be represented in an abuse/neglect case. I don't know if the representation continues, as it should, post-adjudication. Which is what we're talking about.

MR: Considering how inadequate our legal, residential, and therapeutic treatment of children can be, are we really doing kids any favors by putting them in the system?

AV: The answer is, I don't have a crystal ball. And you can easily prove with actual cases, many instances where children were removed from homes that were abusive and neglectful, say, to Level 4, and ended up in situations abusive and neglectful, say, to Level 8. You can actually prove that. You could equally prove that kids have been taken out of abusive homes and as a result their lives have been vastly improved. So I don't think the answer lies in saying, 'is X worse than Y?' The answer really lies in, 'how can Y be made better to the point where that's not a question anymore?' You might as well say to me, 'if somebody gets hit by a car in an intersection, am I really doing them a favor by taking them to the hospital, because after all, doctors commit malpractice?'

MR: Since you mentioned hospitals, please help me with this. When a child is hit by a car and suffers physical damage, you call 911 and a team of well equipped, trained professionals is on the scene in minutes to deal with the situation. But when a child is in pain caused by emotional damage, it can take dozens of calls and several weeks to get any response at all.

AV: We don't have parallel service delivery systems. I mean, there's no way for me to argue with what you're saying. You are a hundred percent correct. But it comes down to the same thing. Our reasons for critiquing the system ... it's pointless. To analyze the system and point out what's wrong with it, without the power to alter it, is masturbatory. The whole concept behind analysis is the concept behind consciousness-raising. Which is, if I show you that something is terrible, you will do something about it. That's not reality. Reality is, it's about power. It's not about education, and knowledge is not power. People think it is because they like comic book cliches. Truth is, if I see a homeless guy on the street and I say, 'all right, here's a road map to Detroit', he still hasn't got bus fare. So what's the knowledge?

MR: He doesn't have the power to get there.

AV: Right, so to criticize the system ... no argument. You're right. But, I wouldn't waste thirty seconds of my life arguing that the 911-response model of professionalism and instantaneousness and goal orientation is exactly the model that we should have in child protective services. Unless you can show me how pressure can be placed to achieve that, I'm not interested.

MR: Well, changing the system takes focus, and people are concerned about poverty, the environment, crime, drug abuse, famine ... the list goes on and on. In your opinion, will these problems be solved eventually if people are willing to focus their efforts on dealing with child abuse first?

AV: Truthfully?

MR: Yeah.

AV: Hell yes. Hell yes. You know, you're asking damaged, impaired people ... Let me give you an example. I'm always asked to be on television shows, like, endlessly. And the shows are always the same thing, which is: bring some of the kids you represent; which I would never do. And the argument I get is; well look at all the good they could do for other kids. And I say, nobody did them any good. Why should they, now, their whole lives they've been suffering, why should they be in a position where they're going to say, 'oh, what I really care about is other kids before myself'. So all the people who are concerned about trees or cigarette smoking or any of the things that bother them, the constituency that would be their natural ally, right now is being impaired and abused. The quality of their lives is being so squeezed, that when they get old enough they're not ever going to be able to focus on these larger concerns. The truth is if we could intervene early and strongly we'd have the best crime prevention program in the country.

Everybody cares about crime. Unless you think criminals are some biogenetic accident, then they have to have a genesis. If you accept that their genesis is their upbringing, logically a front-end investment would make perfect sense. But in a generation that, you know, if something takes too long to download, they don't want to play. Never mind investing in something that's going to take a couple of generations to produce a result.

MR: Of course politicians don't want that either.

AV: Well, no politician wants it because they can't run for reelection ...

MR: They can't take credit for it.

AV: Yeah. It's not going to happen. But that doesn't mean that it can't be done. It's just that people have to be willing to do it. Hey, look, I'm not one to say if you're an activist for civil rights, that child abuse is more important than fighting racism.

MR: No. But it does seem like the first step to solving any of these problems.

AV: Of course it does, because where do you think you get a Klansman or a skinhead? From a warm, loving and protective home? Logically your point is completely correct; selling it is another thing. I've been in the business of trying to sell it for many, many years. And while I think there has been some progress, it's not going to happen in my lifetime. There's been changes, there's been more dialogue, there's been more discussion, there's been more cases won, there's been more representation of children. Systems have altered incrementally. But at the rate we're going, even if you assume we keep the upper hand, that we produce more protected children than beasts ... hundreds of years before we ever get level.

MR: So you believe that every person, that each of us specifically reap the negative impact

of people who prey on children?

AV: Absolutely. Absolutely. And all we have to do is get that to become the conventional wisdom. Because every yuppie will tell you that the bad thing about drunk driving is that it increases the insurance rates. I'll settle for that. I don't need a whole lot of morality. Just use the same mentality and say that a failure to protect children costs us all. Never mind what it costs them, just costs us. On that pure self interest basis, if people would get that, swallow that, internalize that, live that, I'll be a happy man. Because I'll have a religious faith in self-interest. Perceived self-interest, not actual self-interest. Self-interest moves people to do things. It's a question of making them see it. I can make any intelligent person see the connection between today's victim and tomorrow's predator. I can make any intelligent person see that an investment in child protective services actually protects them.

MR: Because it's true.

AV: Because it's true. But you have to get past spin. You have to get past distortion. You have to get past the self-interest of your adversaries.

MR: What's the difference between perceived self-interest and actual self-interest?

AV: Well the actual self-interest of every human being on this planet is to protect children. They don't act on it. Their perception of their self-interest is that it doesn't lie in protecting children. People act off their perceived self-interest every time. In fact, when a person acts against their perceived self-interest we call them clinically insane.

MR: Are they?

AV: That's pretty much the definition of clinical insanity. I don't mean making a bad choice. You know that fire is bad for you, duh. You put your hand in a fire you get burned, right? It's the same 'duh' to let children be abused. Who do you think reaps the whirlwind? It's almost never the offenders. That's why we're so excited when a kid who was abused kills his parents, because it's so rare. When that abused kid goes and kills some citizen we say, 'well, he's an armed robber', 'he's a mugger' ...

MR: As though he didn't come from anywhere.

AV: Right. Exactly. But we're the ones who reap that legacy, not the offenders.

MR: How able are you to spot an abused kid when you meet them as an adult?

AV: Well, you can spot the unbonded person by their conduct. That's it, the unbonded person. I can't spot the abused person because there are people who commit crimes for reasons that have nothing to do with sociology. People who steal because they have inadequate job skills. I'm not saying it's right for them to steal. But there are people who if they had job skills they wouldn't steal. There are people who hurt people because they like to do it. Then I'm guaranteeing you we've got one of ours. You see? When it's predatory for pleasure crime, I guarantee you've got one of ours.

MR: You've said in the past that with 150 million dollars we could revolutionize child protection in this country. How would we go about that and whose hands would we put that money into?

AV: Probably what I would do ... and that's a small amount of money ... you would have to put it in an absolutely targeted area. Change that system entirely and then rely on the fallout. So in other words, 150 million dollars invested. Small area, total reform, twenty year measurements, 150 million dollars in a town that I would ruthlessly divide in half.

MR: What do you mean?

AV: I mean I'd take a damn meat cleaver and go right down the middle. So that I could say, [over] here we did full press intensive services, and [over] there we did what we usually do.

Twenty years later ... a lot more [over] there in prison, a lot more [over] there, dope fiends, a lot more [over] there, suicides ...

MR: And lots more over here are people.

AV: Yeah. You see? That kind of graphic demonstration ... and 150 million dollars is a small sum, but I think that would be enough to prove it. But I could prove it only if given that opportunity. I could prove it to a rational, logical person, but they've got to give me a couple of hours of their time. If I'm going to prove it with slogans, the kind of stuff you could put in USA Today, then I've got to have the 150 million.

MR: Do you ever see this happening?

AV: 150 Million dollars is not a lot of money. You can't even buy a professional baseball team for that, right? Do I see it happening? Yeah. Sooner or later I think the laboratory has got to be opened. I really do. Because to me, see, I'm ready to be challenged. Give me the measurable objectives. I've proved to people ... I said I could run a maximum-security prison for violent youth without any rape, without any stabbing, and without any suicide.

MR: How long did you do that for?

AV: Approximately a year.

MR: What were the numbers like before you went in?

AV: Before I went in, a staff member in the same institution had been sexually assaulted. To call it a jungle would be a compliment.

MR: No rape, no stabbing and no suicide.

AV: Yeah.

MR: And it stayed that way for a year.

AV: Yep.

MR: How old were the kids in this institution?

AV: The truth is that some of them were like, nineteen. We had a fourteen-year-old. The average kid was sixteen and a half and had committed a homicide. That was the typical kid. And this wasn't a detention facility. It was a maximum-security prison, the garbage can of the state. To get in here you had to flunk every other institution with your institutional behavior. Never mind your original crime. I mean, we were dealing with human beings that had been written off completely and getting a result from them that was shocking. We had achieved some remarkable things.

MR: In addition to running that prison, you've also been an investigator. I've heard you say that child abuse cases aren't investigated the way that they should be. What constitutes a proper investigation?

AV: A proper investigation is an objective, chips fall where they may, search for the truth; conducted by skillful people with the proper tools and the proper supervision. And none of that applies to Child Protective Services. None of that. I mean, basic interviewing skills take a

YOU ONLY GET THE ONE SHOT. AND I WILL NOT FORGET MINE TO THIS DAY BECAUSE I GOT A WOMAN WHO WAS A MEMBER OF THE NATION OF ISLAM WHO ACTUALLY GREETED ME WITH, "HELLO MR. DEVIL."

long time to learn. When I was an investigator for the feds, the United States Public Health Service, you had to pass a test. You went through the whole academy, but I don't care how well you scored on the damn written crap, and in the face-to-faces, what they did was- My test was in a public hospital on the south side of Chicago. [Interview the] next person in the door that had syphilis. Blind. Closed circuit TV running. I had to get that person to disclose their sexual contacts. Fail? You're out.

MR: That was it? You get one shot?

AV: Oh yeah. I mean, you could go back in the class and start over. Fail a couple of times and you're history. You only get the one shot. And I will not forget mine to this day because I got a woman who was a member of the Nation of Islam who actually greeted me with, "Hello Mr. Devil." And we started from there.

MR: So why don't people who work with kids and their abusers receive this kind of training, or have to pass a test before they work?

AV: Because it costs too much money. [Sarcastically] This was about something serious. This was about sexually transmitted diseases. This wasn't about kids. Adults can get that. Adults were the entire focus.

MR: Would it work to train caseworkers, group home staff or foster parents this way, and use the same kind of test?

AV: Well, first of all it would be a much more complicated test because we had to learn to interview men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, black people and white people, all of that. We were interviewing them all off the exact same set of questions.

MR: You knew what the problem was.

AV: We knew what the problem was. They had the disease. There's no mystery here, right? The question is where did they get it? And we knew the period within which they must have gotten it because the duration of the disease is such; if someone had early, primary, secondary syphilis, we were looking at a ninety-day to six-month window. That's all, no more. So we had a lot of information. Now we're going to go interview a child. A kid maybe two and a half years old, you know, barely verbal. A kid maybe fourteen, and a sophisticated liar. It's very, very different. So it would be a lot more training, a lot more supervision, and the problem would be that when you got the people who were very good at it keeping them.

MR: Because they're not getting paid enough?

AV: Sure, they're not getting paid enough. They're not getting respected enough. And it's the nature of government that you always promote somebody outside their skills. So you could have an excellent field person, a fine investigator and interviewer, and that person is going to end up being what?

MR: Administrator.

AV: Sure. Now, the cops in New York have a technique called getting the money. In order to protect that from happening with their most experienced field guys, they have a provision in which they can pay them as if they took a desk job but leave them out on the street.

MR: Pretty cool.

AV: Very slick. No question. But they don't have that for casework yet.

MR: Right. The pyramid is still upside down.

AV: Of course. But there is no law that says it has to be. If you want to make a front-end investment, turn the pyramid upside down. Put the money where it's supposed to be, you get a result. Unless and until the resources are allocated, it's not going to happen. Resources will get allocated when people perceive it in their self-interest to pressure to get them done, not before. So we chip away. We chip away. And we try to have every campaign produce some tangible result. But there's not going to be any high-fives at the end of this run for me, because it's not going to get done while I'm still here.

MR: But is it working?

AV: In my mind I'm swimming, the way you swim at a horizon. You get tired, eventually you drown. But there are other waves coming behind, and more waves coming behind that.

MR: So you don't ever see yourself stopping?

AV: Nah. I could do what I do in a wheelchair. So, no, I don't see why I would. And I don't actually have any other interests. So this would be it.

MR: What about the Blues?

AV: Oh. That's a misstatement on my part, because I really do have plenty of other interests. But none that I would be able to spend my whole life doing exclusively. Yeah. You know, I could get another racehorse someday. I've always wanted to breed dogs. You know, my kind of dogs someday. I'll write more music someday.

MR: Do you play an instrument?

AV: Nope.

MR: Words?

AV: Words. I write the words. Son [Seals] writes the music. And I did it before with Doc and I'll probably do it my whole life. But I have the musical talent of a rock, you know? But none of that would consume me. I don't know. Things could change. But I've been at it for so long I don't anticipate it.

MR: I want to ask you one more question.

AV: Sure.

MR: When you meet a child for the first time how do you make them feel safe right off the bat?

AV: You know, that's really a good question. Children don't always like me. In fact, a lot of them don't. But they always seem to feel safe. If the kid is old enough that I can explain the realities, it's easy enough to say what my job is and what's not going to happen to them anymore, and be very clear about that. If they're real little ones, I don't have any magic.

MR: No. Nobody does.

AV: Yes. People do. Not magic, but people do have a sense about themselves, a chi that is very comforting to kids. I don't have that.

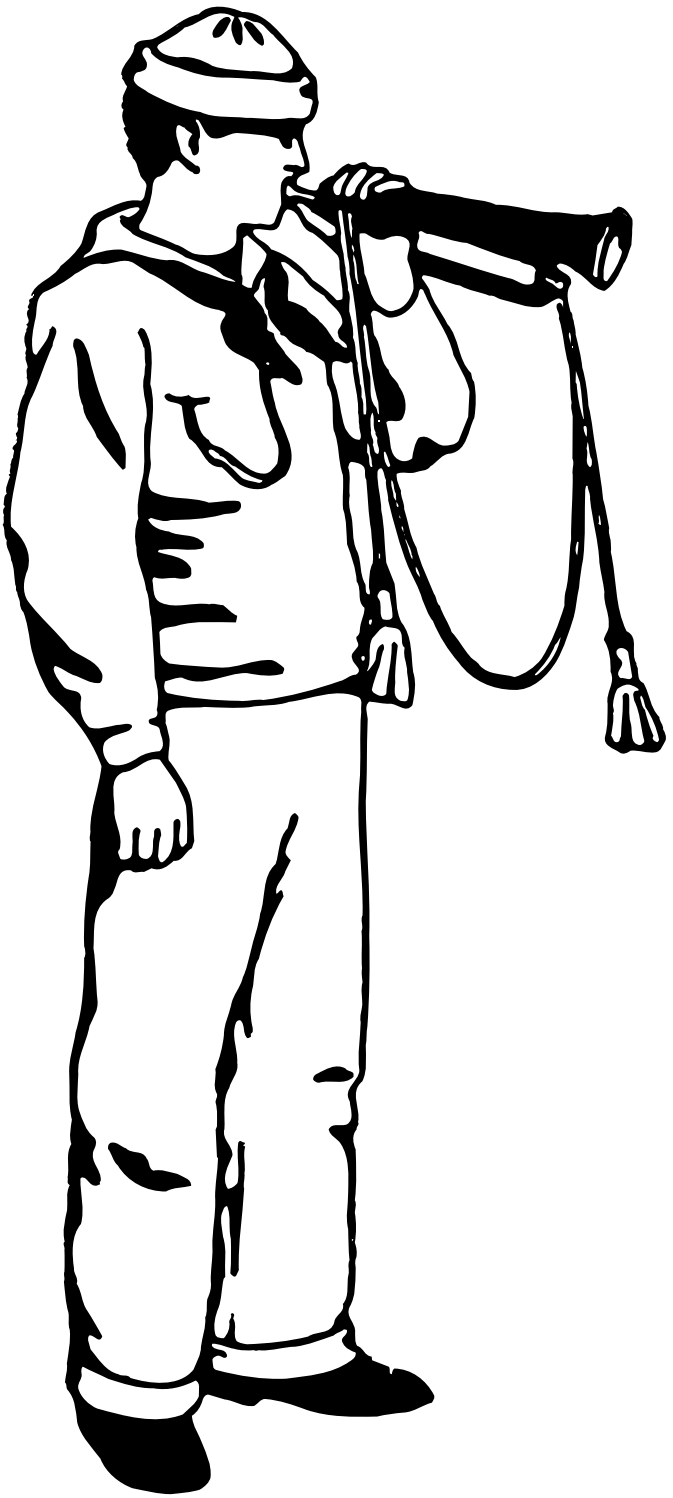
MR: Some kids are just going to feel threatened.

AV: Some kids are so traumatized that everything scares them. But I've never had a kid not feel safe after a while because what I always do is promise things.

MR: And deliver.

AV: Yep. Until they see it. As long as you're consistent, as long as you always keep your word, it's a new experience for most kids in that situation and you can build trust. ◀◀

For more information about Andrew Vachss, his novels and his fight, visit his website, **The Zero** at http://www.vachss.com



FTAA

FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS

•What follows is eight pages that would never appear in the mainstream media•
•This section is dedicated to an independent view of the FTAA protests•

IF YOU THOUGHT NAFTA SPELLED TROUBLE

Free Trade Area of the Americas: Fueling the Race to the Bottom

From April 20–22, in Quebec City, Canada, leaders of thirty-four nations will meet to further the ratification of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), slated for completion before 2005. This "effort to unite the economies of the Western Hemisphere [excluding Cuba] into a single free trade arrangement" began during the Organization of American States' (OAS) December 1994 Summit of the Americas in Miami. According to the OAS, "These [FTAA] negotiations will encompass all of those areas previously negotiated and which fall within the World Trade Organization's ambit, with the goal of going beyond previously agreed multilateral liberalization within the Hemisphere, wherever possible."

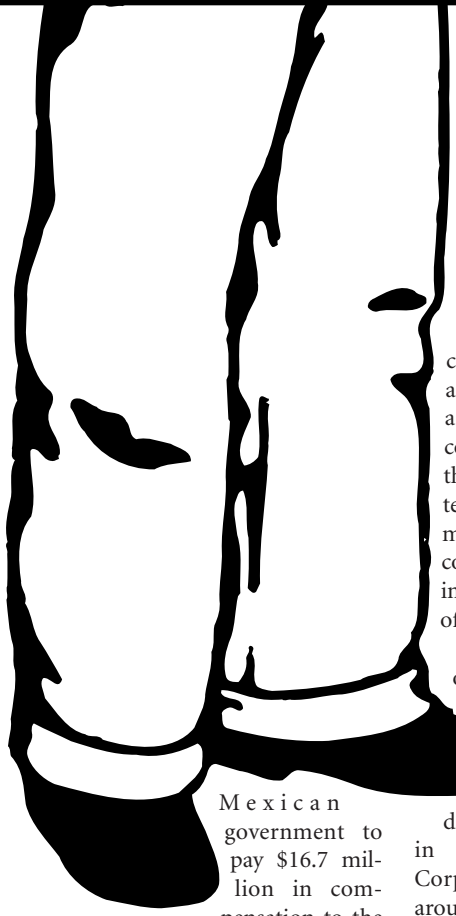
Similar to the World Trade Organization (WTO), FTAA decisions occur behind closed doors amongst non-elected officials. The process involves a three-tiered model of appointed international representatives: the Trade Ministers of the Western Hemisphere (who have met four times since 1994), Vice Ministers of Trade, and nine FTAA Negotiating Groups. While the business community has direct access to these proceedings, officials have blatantly rejected the presence of any citizens' groups. Instead, they have established the Committee of Government Representatives on Civil Society Participation, a mechanism that filters all public concerns through an ineffectual government delegation.

A RECIPE FOR DISASTER

If implemented, FTAA policies, a more extreme version of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), will spread the latter's devastating effects throughout the Americas, further broadening the disparity between rich and poor and destroying the environment, as corporate interests continue to take precedence above all else. With its expanded scope of negotiable areas, FTAA will impact almost every aspect our lives, including workers' rights, agriculture, healthcare, immigration, education and the prison industrial complex. The proposed agreement embodies the neo-liberal principles that have guided "globalization," allowing market forces to dictate every interaction. Service sectors such as schools, medical care, postal delivery, prisons and water supplies will necessarily become fair game for privatization.

Modeled after NAFTA's infamous Chapter 11, FTAA will undermine the regulatory power of sovereign nations by permitting corporations to initiate "investor-to-state" lawsuits over any legislation that may impact their profits. For example, a NAFTA tribunal ordered the

by Michelle Steinberg
SF/Bay Area Independent Media Center



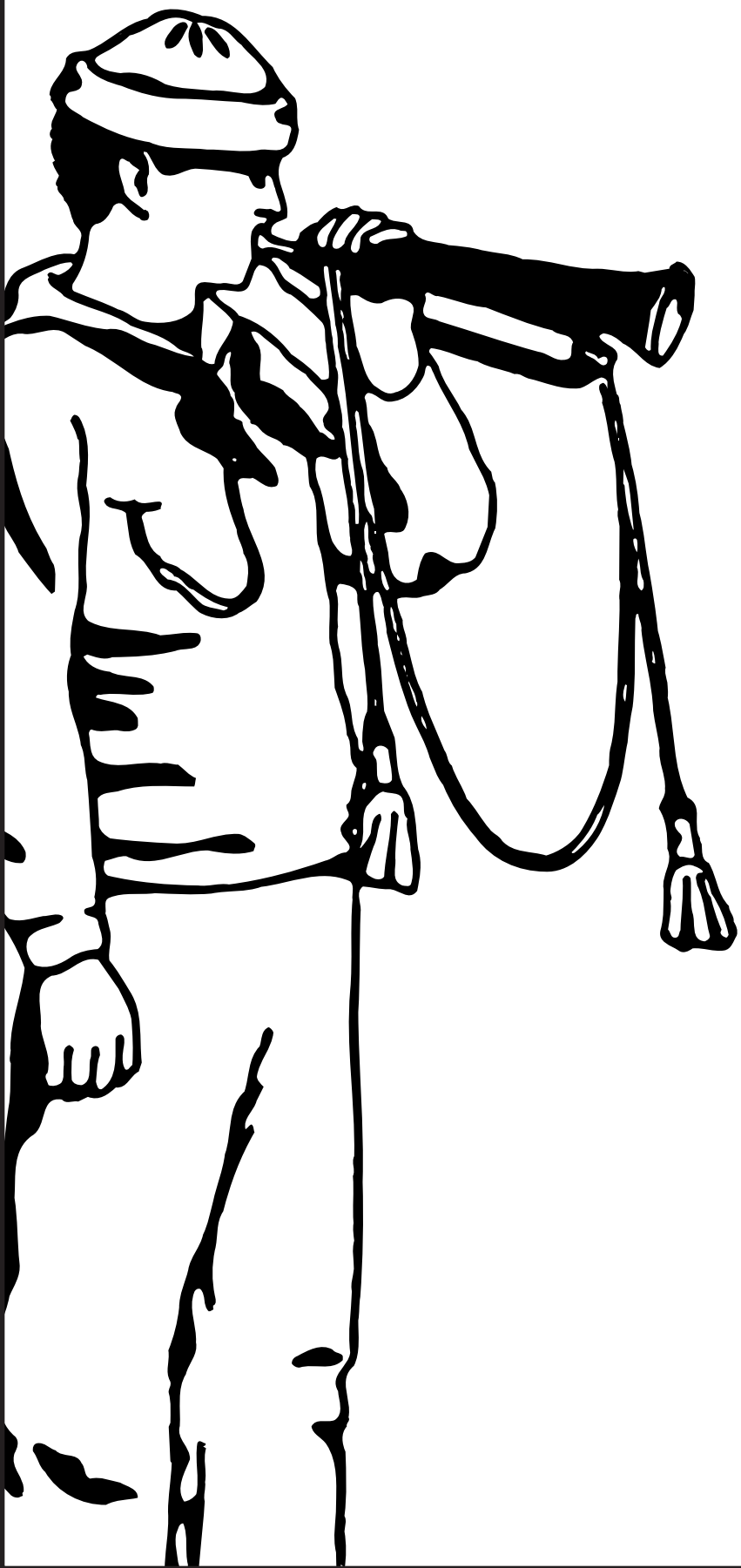
Mexican government to pay $16.7 million in compensation to the U.S. based Metalclad Corporation after a Mexican state shut down the company's toxic waste disposal facility, a contaminant to the local water supply. The ruling found that despite the site's destructive effects, the State Governor's actions (prompted by the concerned local community) had violated the corporation's inalienable "right" to profit. Furthermore, the exorbitant penalty was based on the concept of "regulatory expropriation," whereby a government is responsible for compensating a corporation not only for actual material loss, but for any potential profits that could have been attained in the future. Such rulings foster a system where governments, legally accountable to corporations, allow business interests to dictate the shape of any future legislation.

Meanwhile, FTAA's lack of enforceable labor protections guarantees that workers throughout the hemisphere will suffer decreased wages and a decline in working conditions. Corporations will shuttle around their factories, relocating to countries that offer the lowest wages and weakest unions. Under NAFTA, nearly 400,000 jobs have been lost, with re-employed workers earning an average of 77% of their previous wages. To ensure the lowest operating expenses in their Mexican maquiladoras, employers routinely engage in violent union busting. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union and the United Electrical Workers Union have both passed resolutions condemning FTAA, citing NAFTA's negative impact.

While borders remain wide open to goods and services, people are not allotted similar privileges. The maintenance of a cheap workforce requires a "captive audience," as laborers with the option to migrate would likely seek out better conditions. Thus, FTAA will inevitably lead to further militarization of borders and a vicious crack-down on immigration.

FTAA also seeks to extend Intellectual Property Rights (IRP), the rules which protect corporate patents, allowing a company with marketing rights in a particular country to maintain an exclusive patent for the entire region. These laws enable pharmaceutical companies, for instance, to charge inflated prices for drugs, while blocking the manufacture of generic versions. In Brazil, where the government has sponsored an effective program to provide free AIDS drugs, FTAA will ban the essential generic medicines. Millions of people, unable to afford the costly brand name alternatives, will no longer have the option of treatment.

The existing proposals will also force countries to accept any agricultural imports, effectively breaking down barriers for large agribusinesses. As cheaper agricultural products flood their



local markets, small family farms (in many countries, a primary form of subsistence for indigenous populations) are suddenly unable to compete. Forced off their land by economic necessity, or actually displaced as governments award land rights to multinational corporations, many people face factory work as the only option.

FTAA also prohibits individual governments from banning genetically modified (GM) foods and seeds. This policy's implications for public health and the environment are potentially devastating. GM seeds contain gene sequences specifically engineered to decrease a plant's vulnerability to insects. Unfortunately, the repercussions of this deliberate toxicity to pests are virtually unknown. In addition, giant corporations such as Monsanto (coincidentally, a major manufacturer of Agent Orange in the 1960s) own patents to the seeds, and often force farmers to sign a pledge that makes seed replanting illegal, thus ensuring return customers every season. This presents an economic impossibility for small farmers, enabling corporate agriculture to triumph again.

RISE UP, FIGHT BACK!

An array of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), unions, grassroots groups and concerned individuals have united to contest FTAA's decidedly undemocratic process and its intended goals. Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART), which includes representatives of environmental, human-rights, U.S. labor, women's, family-farm, development, religious and public-policy organizations, has presented the Committee of Government Representatives on Civil Society Participation with "Alternatives for the Americas: Building a Hemispheric Peoples' Agreement." The document contends that "trade and investment should not be ends in themselves, but rather the instruments for achieving just and sustainable development. Citizens must have the right to participate in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of hemispheric social and economic policies. Central goals of these policies should be to promote economic sovereignty, social welfare, and reduced inequality at all levels."

Broad coalitions are planning massive demonstrations in Quebec City during the April convention, as well as solidarity actions along both US/Canadian and US/Mexican borders, and throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. The Anti-

Capitalist Convergence (CLAC) and Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee (CASA) are organizing a Carnival Against Capitalism, which will include teach-ins, workshops, concerts, street theater, direct action, protests and more. An autonomous, decentralized, and non-hierarchical network, CLAC/CASA intends to shut down the anti-democratic proceedings. The Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA), a coalition of organizations and social movements from North, Central and South America will simultaneously convene in Quebec for the Second People's Summit of the Americas, designed to challenge neo-liberal development models and generate alternative policies.

By January, Canadian border patrol had already begun to turn away suspected demonstrators. Canadian authorities, preparing the largest police deployment in the country's history, will establish a four square mile security perimeter in downtown Quebec, surrounded by an enormous metal fence. There are plans to clear six hundred plus inmates from a local prison for the duration of the Summit to house arrested protesters. Local legislators also unsuccessfully attempted to pass a bylaw which would have made it illegal to "wear or have in your possession a mask, hood, ski mask, or any other object of the same nature to cover one's face, in whole or in part." The intensity of the state's authoritarian response is not surprising. As the overall movement to contest global capitalism continues to grow, that system's guardians persist in cutting back the rights of its opponents. ◂◂

GET INVOLVED:
Throughout the Western Hemisphere, preparations are underway, including teach-ins, organizational meetings, and preliminary protests. For further information visit:

www.stopftaa.org
Comprehensive resource page, sponsored by Freedom Rising
www.quebec2001.org
CLAC/Carnival Against Capitalism
www.sommetdespeuples.org
HAS/People's Summit of the Americas
www.indymedia.org
Independent Media Center global site, with links to over 40 local IMCs
www.sf.indymedia.org/ftaa/
SF/Bay Area IMCs FTAA feature page

QC UPDATE- PRISON REPORT

by Michelle April 26 2001, Thu, 3:25pm

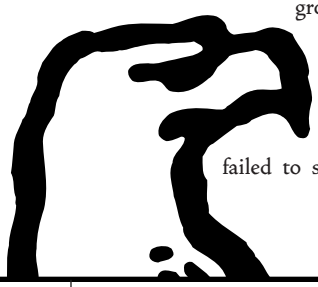
content originally posted on indymedia.org

The battle continues for those arrested during the FTAA protests. Quebec Police report 463 arrests in total throughout the FTAA protests. On Wednesday, April 25th, the Québec Legal Collective announced that one woman and twenty-nine men still remained in custody at Prison d`Orsainville . However, this figure did not include the untold number who had been unable to contact the outside. One former prisoner recalled being silenced by police when he attempted to share the legal hotline information with a fellow activist. Authorities released approximately 200 people between Monday the 23rd and Tuesday the 24th; that many were freed with no charges pending constitutes strong evidence of illegal arrests.

Accounts of physical abuse and intimidation tactics by the police are rampant. Prior to their arrival at the prison, many demonstrators were held for long hours in buses with no access to restrooms and limited availability of food and water. Authorities refused to accommodate prisoners' dietary restrictions. Medical treatment was often unavailable; activists frequently had to agitate before guards administered proper care. Men were stripped naked in groups and sprayed with cold water to decontaminate from tear gas. Menstruating women were reportedly denied tampons and pads. Four to six prisoners were contained in single occupancy cells.

Some individuals recalled being awakened in the middle of the night to interrogations by "intelligence personnel." These officials, who appeared to have U.S. accents, questioned the prisoners about their political affiliations. In one case, an American woman was confronted with previous charges committed as a juvenile that had been supposedly sealed in her record. Members of the Quebec Legal Collective observed FBI agents' signatures in the jail's sign-in book.

At least one protester plans to launch a class-action lawsuit against the police for brutality. One of several incidents occurred after authorities denied the woman access to an attorney. When she began chanting in protest, six riot police suddenly pinned her to the ground. As they dragged her across the jail courtyard, the woman's sweatpants slid down. She was left half-naked as the guards had failed to supply her with underwear.



These events took place in front of several Summit of the Americas employees who were present in the yard. Police later dropped the woman's charges, likely in an attempt to stem the repercussions of their misconduct.

Across the board, both charges and the corresponding penalties were administered in a decidedly arbitrary fashion. One man who was freed without charges mentioned that his friend, who had been standing next to him when arrested, remained incarcerated on substantial bail. In another instance, the police designated a demonstrator's drumsticks as parts of an explosive device. When authorities raided a free food station, they took one man into custody for simply inquiring about the return of pans and food supplies. Jaggi Singh, a well-known spokesperson for the Anti-Capitalistic Convergence (CLAC), has been denied bail and will potentially remain in custody until his trial, which could be several months away. Officers specifically targeted men, as reflected in the arrest ratio. On Monday night, only 17 of the remaining 253 prisoners were women.

Massive amounts of confusion reigned over the release proceedings. In some cases, police processed and received bail from activists, but then failed to release them. Officials closed the bail window unexpectedly early on Tuesday. Bail generally ranged from $100-500, with the majority fixed at $300. There are reports of intentional mishandling of people after release. In several instances, freed demonstrators were dropped off at distant locations across the city, which directly contradicted the addresses given to supporters.

Activists have been conducting solidarity actions both inside and outside the prison. At one point, approximately 30 prisoners refused to provide their names; a number of these individuals participated in a hunger strike. From the weekend onwards, an average of 50 people maintained a solidarity vigil in front of the prison, chanting their support and serving warm meals to the recently released. 10,000 students at 3 colleges in Montreal held a general strike, refusing to go to classes in solidarity with the prisoners. On Wednesday afternoon, CLAC/CASA sponsored a demonstration calling for the activists' release. Legal fund donations can be sent to Quebec Legal Defence, 1615 Bernard, Outremont, Quebec H2V 1X2; visit quebec2001.org for further details. ◂◂

FROM THE STREETS

content originally posted on indymedia.org

Latest Arrests in Connection with FTAA Protests
by MicHelle

Wednesday, April 18, 2001, 10:16pm
Police have begun the latest round of FTAA-related arrests.

As the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Summit draws near, police have begun the first round of arrests. On the night of Tuesday, April 16th, six people were taken into custody in Quebec City on conspiracy charges. They were allegedly caught in possession of smoke bombs and/or other incendiary devices. An unconfirmed report stated that one of the individuals has since been released.

Also on Tuesday, one minor was arrested for carrying a weapon. Authorities apparently targeted the youth because of his "punk rock" appearance, taking him into custody when their search revealed a pocketknife. He pled "Not Guilty", and was released today, on the condition that he steer clear of further protest activities.

Eyewitnesses have offered unconfirmed reports of four other arrests: one person at Laval University in Quebec and two in Montreal. Details on the fourth are, as of yet, unknown.

The Quebec Legal Collective also reports that police have been detaining a significant number of people, some in connection with immigration issues. At 5:00pm today in Quebec City, authorities stopped an RV holding seven members of the independent media, detaining them for several hours. At least fifteen officers from several jurisdictions visited the scene, including undercover agents from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

City Under Seige: QC Update
by IMC Folks
Saturday, April 21, 2001, 1:00am
Update from within the dense cloud of toxic gas that currently engulfs Quebec City.
At 10:00 pm tonight, hundreds of people were still congregated at the top of Cote de Abraham, as police continued to lob tear gas canisters from behind the perimeter. A unit of officers maintained tight formation on the other side of the fence, their plastic sheilds gleaming in the streetlights. Over the next two hours, tear gas from similar skirmishes wafted throughout the city, affecting demonstrators and non-participating residents alike, as police indiscriminately launched their silver canisters.

At Rene Levesque, where protesters had toppled the perimeter earlier in the day, dozens of black-clad, gas-masked officers slowly advanced upon a scattered crowd. Using police dogs for maximum intimidation, the authorites repeatedly launched tear gas projectiles, which the angry onlookers retrieved and returned with equal fervor.

Around 12:00 am, the police moved along the Cote d`Abraham towards the Independent Media Center (CMAQ, building), again rifling relentless tear gas attacks upon the remaining protesters. After pushing the crowd down the street, the police retracted and remained stationary, continuing to gas those at the front.

The demonstrators were engaged in no forceful movements towards police; most people simply waited for the next launch. A couple of small fires were lit outside CMAQ, which firefighters extinguished a short time later. A small dumpster and a wooden chair were amongst the items ignited. Police simultaneously pushed their way towards the highway overpass above the Art Zone, forcing protesters onto the bridge.

At 2:00 am, about twenty-five people conducted a peaceful sit-in outside the Indymedia Center building. Police responded with the expected barrage of tear gas. An hour later, as a fire again blazed in the middle of the street, authorities arrived with a water cannon.

QC Update: Arrests Continue
by MicHelle
Sunday, April 22 2001, 8:48pm
As residual tear gas pollutes the air and people casually roam Quebec City streets, police continue to traverse the city, carrying out random arrests.

Sunday, April 22, 3 :45pm
Wandering along the perimeter, we rounded a corner at Rue St. Patrice and came upon several dozen people milling about, as two officers patrolled from behind the fence. Suddenly, two white vans screeched into the alley. Approximately ten cops jumped out, swiftly grabbing two men. The police roughly jostled one into the van, while shoving the second against a brick wall. A small crowd gathered to observe, confronting the police with shouts of "Fascist" and chants of "Solidarity". The officers glanced around menacingly and fingered their pepper spray, before diving back into the vehicle and roaring off.

The police appeared to have targeted the two individuals in advance. According to a bystander, moments earlier a group of people had begun shouting at the patrolling officers. Apparently, one of those arrested had been shaking the chain-link fence. A policewoman then spoke into a radio, precipitating the vans' rapid arrival and likely designating the individuals for arrest.

We remained in the alley following the incident, as a demonstrator recounted an experience from earlier in the day. Walking down a particularly gas-filled street, he was accosted by two officers sporting elaborate gas masks. Threatening the young man with arrest, they instructed him to remove his goggles and ski mask immediately. He explained that he could not, as they were necessary for protection from the toxic fumes. They repeated their warning, allowing him to proceed only after he followed their orders.

As we chatted, two men strolled around the corner on the inside of the perimeter. They continued along the grass for several minutes. The patrolling officer approached them and appeared to request their passes (required for presence behind the fence). One of the men attempted to hand him a stack of papers instead. The policeman pushed him violently onto the concrete, pinning his arms behind his back, and unleashing a flurry of anti-FTAA flyers. Bystanders rushed over toward the fence, outraged by the flagrant brutality. Several police vehicles arrived after a short time later and the men were hustled inside, but not before one raised his arms in triumph. The crowd burst into cheers, again chanting "Solidarity".

Meanwhile, two more men approached the police, displaying their perimeter passes. Stepping a few yards away from the officers, they unrolled a large anti-FTAA banner. The crowd cheered, as the authorities looked on grudgingly. Apparently the possession of valid passes afforded the men this right, which the police temporarily chose not to violate. ◂◂

Unamerican to MediaReader

Dear Mediareader,

Before you collapse into your predictable round of self-congratulatory backslapping at having struck such a crippling blow on me and my oh-so-unworthy business, I'd like to direct your attention towards the following:

* Item: Josh, in his "candid expose", chose to interview but one extremely biased subject during a time of deep (albeit justified) disillusion and cite at length a one-sided, hate-filled (and utterly unjustified) critique in the pages of fucking Maximum Rock And Roll, a publication that's famous for pretending to be objective when its only REAL objective is to remain chief tastemaker for those who would define what is and isn't "punk", no matter whose legs get broken as a consequence.

* Item: Josh implies that my inferior business skills had led Unamerican Activities to utter ruin, despite the fact that the year 2000 was our strongest sales year yet even though I took a month off in order to transplant my operations across the country. In so doing, Josh ignored the complete redesign of my site, over one hundred new stickers and buttons, free .pdf greeting cards, and book deal that have made my project - according to my own standards - WAY radder than ever before; all of which took place during this year of Unamerican's purported demise.

* Item: As in the aforementioned MRR hit piece, Josh chooses a reductionist logic of only mentioning that I sell stickers and other merchandise, casually neglecting the fact that there are nearly 200 pages of writing on unamerican.com, almost all of which are philosophical in nature (refer to http://www.unamerican.com/truth for one major example). In truth, Unamerican is as much 'zine as it is business; perhaps 'zinesters are not supposed to actually survive off their efforts?

* Item: James and I have discussed several misrepresentations that were made during his interview; i can forward our correspondence to you for your enlightenment about these issues upon request. Notable among them is the assertion that I lied about my famous "poverty sucks" campaign, which is an accusation so incredible I could hardly believe it. This happened a good year and a half before James even worked for me, which would explain why he had no personal knowledge of it, but your publication of this without fact-checking is just fucking stupid.

Why is it that you intellectual "punks" continually miss the forest for the trees when observing my efforts? What ails you fuckers? The only explanation I can think of when I read these kinds of attacks upon me is fear; fear that I might actually be a nice person with an honest intent of changing people's lives for the better through my memes, thus giving the lie to your ideological distaste for businesses in general. Let me assure you that you are correct to fear this. My manner is far from that you implied, as anyone who knows me (viz. the long list of close friends that graces the dedication on my home page) could tell you. Of course, no effort was made to contact anyone with anything favorable to say about me; such bias I simply cannot excuse as anything other than editorial privilege and agenda.

While James and I had our differences, I only skimped on him when his requests were unreasonable (travel plans that excluded me but depended on my financing, his claim of ownership of half the business despite having invested not one dime in its execution and drawing a salary even while I lived on credit cards, etc.) I flew him to North Carolina with me, drove him down to Vegas and up to the WTO protests, and bought him a brand new grape iMac as a parting gesture; in this light, to characterize me as ungenerous is an injustice. I regret that our communication was poor on many fronts, but our friendship was (and is) richer than you will ever be able to understand. Ask him now what he thinks about me and I am sure you will find that his evaluation will be much more favorable!

This tendency towards disregarding the most basic tenets of objective journalism (for Christ's sake, you're MEDIAREADER! you should KNOW better!) in order to get your readers to leap to the conclusion that I am a fitting scapegoat for the "selling out" of your pathetic subculture is why I can no longer identify myself as "punk rock". I hold this need to lynch one after another success story from within your subculture as beneath contempt; in light of my recent successes, your article was laughably out of date the moment it was published. I have always considered my career an exercise in service; I left a lucrative career in the dot-com world in order to begin a meager existence in pursuit of my hopes that free expression could make a difference in people's lives, and I have many megabytes of thanks from people who have found my efforts worthwhile. I don't need your approval to know I'm doing good work; my readers and customers tell me so every day.

It makes me sad that such poor effort should issue forth from a journal which in other respects I hold in high regard. Certainly my business is not above criticism, and I have definitely made more than my share of mistakes in the past. But why do you insist on holding me mute while YOU fucking judge me on criteria as terribly personal as my FINANCIAL APTITUDE, for the love of God? By coming across as authoritative during your dissection of my life's work, you give yourselves the power of redefining reality according to your own agenda. Would that I were critiqued by CNN or the National Review instead! Why must your agenda include my destruction?

Could it be that I have violated a powerful taboo that exists in punk rock circles against the "marketing of rebellion", even though I have placed perhaps three ads (two in punk planet, one in some other small 'zine I can't remember) during the six-year history of my business? Have I ever read anything similarly trenchant written about, say, the marketing logic of Victory or Fat, who spend THOUSANDS on advertising to convince kids to buy their infinite variations on the same insipid musical themes? Cue D. Boon: "Let the products sell themselves!" My products do not sell because of marketing; they sell because of their HONESTY - they FUCKING RULE, they FOMENT REAL CHAOS, they START CONVERSATIONS, they TEACH RADICALISM, and people SHOW THEM OFF to each other!

I have become a new man as a result of the difficulties I faced in 1999. I have never been more proud of my project and my team, and the fact that you and other punks seem to get such pleasure in deriding me makes me want to puke. I am a human being and I deserve respect and room to grow through my troubles; by painting me like some kind of permanent cynical asshole, WITHOUT EVEN HAVING THE COURTESY TO TALK TO ME, you have done yourself and your readers a great disservice. I invite you to talk to me directly, because in many ways Unamerican is a fascinating project with an astonishing ability to affect people far outside your little hardcore circle. I challenge you to ask me whatever hard-hitting questions your brain trust can think of instead of making hypotheses behind my back. Perhaps you will even have the guts to do so; failing that, I certainly hope you at least see fit to print this letter.

yours in solidarity,
!!!srini

ps: at least josh, unlike mimi, can write without sounding like a blowhard PC idiot. his chops as a writer are acknowledged.

REVIEWS

NOTE TO THOSE SENDING REVIEW MATERIAL

MediaReader has an extremely limited amount of space to work with and, as such, only reviews videos, books, and full-length recordings. We do not review zines, 7" singles, CD singles, or label compilations composed of exclusively that label's bands. Also, we will no longer review CDs sent without the intended packaging, as we also review the design of the cover. Though some PR people write and ask for it, NO ONE receives a better review by placing an ad. We encourage all reviewers to be as critical and honest as possible without being overly-anything. If this has not scared you enough and you have an item that you are going to make us review, send it to **MediaReader, Post Box 641544, Chicago, IL 60664, USA.** Book reviews return next issue.

Reviewers this issue:
Al Burian (AB), Sean Husick (SH), Dave Laney (DL), Roby Newton (RN).

Braid "Killing A Camera" Video ★★★★★
Bifocal Media
www.bifocalmedia.com
Everyone familiar with the Urbana/Champaigne sound of emo knows and loves the hard-working, always-touring Braid. This is a video documentation of their final five days playing shows, an end to an era. It is certainly has the best sound quality of any Bifocal video so far (past efforts: "The Actuality of Thought" and "The Whistle of the Missile") and has great, multiple-camera shots of live shows. The shows are throughout the midwest, the homeland of those emo superstars, and due to their incredible popularity, all appeared to be totally packed. Interspersed with the show footage, the band is interviewed about their breakup and reflections on the life of their band. Several different forms of film were used, then transferred to video, which created wonderful texture and depth to the piece as a whole. Bifocal is doing great things on their own terms. Keep on the lookout for their next projects.

Design: Bifocal Media ★★★★★
Consistent quality in cover design with these folks, they encorporate painting or painterly styles with tight design, a rarely functional feat. A well-placed film strip with stills of the band cuts a diagonal and indicates the content. Maps form the base of the layered look while some cut-and-paste punk flyers spell out the title. Beautiful packaging for a beautiful document.

American Heritage "Through the Age of Quarrel and Into the Era..." ★★★½
Troubleman, www.troublemanunlimited.com
American Heritage play the most intensely confusing math-metal precision rock out there. Odd time signatures and beats that leave you thumping your hand, trying aimlessly to keep rhythm. It's a instrumental three-piece from Chicago, one guy of which I often see from a distance at the lumber store. Think of Paul Newman if all the members were metal heads. I like the and last song the best- an electronic piece that pushes along, ending on the same computery note they begin with: a singing Macintosh voice. Solid and innovative
Design ★½
a computery, futuristic collage of newspapers, post-it notes, and a figure probably modeled in the 3d computer program "poser." the main thing i don't like is the nude woman on the covers. The back highlights a close-up of her boobs and crotch. this is a pc magazine, right?

Anasarca "Discography" CD ★★★½
Second Nature Recordings
POB 11543, Kansas City, MO 64138
Collection of all material, 1994-1997, from a real stand-out emo band. "Classic" quiet/loud, start/stop, screamo, mid-tempo hardcore. Lots of bands sounded like this at the time, but few could turn heads at their shows. This band could. They were of the best emo emo emo bands that existed. It's still good, and nice to see the whole collection in one place.
Design, Planaria ★★★★
most sn releases look nice. this one looks great. placid, soft feel overall that relies mostly on a series of great photos. Solid job. "no complaints." ha ha! (DL)

Anti-Flag "Underground Network" ★★★
Fat Wreck Chords
As far as a slick punk rock record goes, this is a pretty commendable release, veritably oozing sincerity and effort. The lyrics, while at times simplistic, are passionate in their articulation of in-your-face leftist politics. There is not an ounce of cynicism to be found here: on the title track the singer intones, "a pirate radio transmits into the night/ and from DC to Peking e-mail warns of our lost global rights/ and the hoax the world leaders wanted no one to see/ comes crashing down on their heads." (E-mail?!?) Almost every song comes with some elucidating statistics or quotation; the song "Panama deception" even includes liner notes written by Howard Zinn, author of A People's History of the United States, specifically for the album. And, in keeping with the liberatory power of e-mail theme, they've got a whole page of e-mail contacts for people who want to get involved with various worthwhile-sounding organizations. So I really have to give them an A for effort and intention here, and, while I personally find the music somewhat formulaic and by-the-numbers (it's better than average Rancid-type fare), I can't say that it is played mechanically or without passion, and, in truth, for the audience this seems intended for (and who will probably get the most out of the message it's conveying) the music is probably right on target.
Design: John Yates. ★★★
it's hard to separate the packaging from the album, in a way, because the whole thing is obviously intended as a total package (i.e., you're supposed to be looking at the graphics, reading the lyrics and information, etc. while listening, not doing homework or playing this as background music). so, again, the same basic assessment: obviously a lot of work and good intention went into this, and the overall effect conveys a really good, positive message. at the same time, everything about this, from the color scheme to the choice of fonts to the outfits the band members are wearing, serve to give the consumer exactly what they expect, rather than challenging their assumptions in any way. And again, as with the music, i guess in some sense that's good. why alienate people with your art when, essentially, the function of the art is propagandistic? muzac for the revolution, sure, complete with pre-fab graphics, wardrobe, posters, patches- but, fuck, at least it's for the revolution. (AB)

The Album Leaf "In An Off White Room" ★★★★
Troubleman Unlimited
16 Willow Street, Bayonne, NJ 07002
Subtle, atmospheric, at times almost trip-hop, the Album Leaf creates soundscapes and environments that aren't so ambient to be boring, but continue with such a flow that you couldn't really label it "song". The sounds and samples have great beats supporting them, a good deal of the appeal. This should come as no surprise, as the Album Leaf is none other than Jimmy Lavelle, drummer of Tristeza. This EP is right in line with emotive soundtrack movement (think Godspeed, Movietones), and definitely another score to add to the collection.
Design: i lost the sleeve, but it looked good. Nice contour drawing, i remember it being a three-star design job. (RN)

The Aquabats "Myths, Legends..." ★
Fearless Records
13772 Goldenwest #545, Westminster, CA 92683
The Aquabats are one of those feel-good comedy ska/funk/metal bands, appealing to those who always wanted to skank/mosh to They Might Be Giants. This particular CD is a collection of B-sides, outtakes, and other random unreleased items. It's well-recorded, however I'm not certain that the world needs more Weird Al.
Design: Christian and Parker Jacobs ★★★
brightly colored castles and monsters vaguely resembling those present in greek mythology adorn the cover, rendered in a childish manner. a photo of the band in full medieval garb spans the centerfold. the artistic concept is consistent with the musical theme, and i like that. (RN)

Bad Astronaut "Acrophobe" ★½
Honest Don's Recordings
More or less bad pop music that sounds a lot like Weezer most of the time but gets "sentimental" and slow at others. It's pop punk that isn't very funny or witty or challenging to the genre, but you just may hear it on alternative radio.
Design ★
almost funny but just straight up busted. (DL)

Beauty Pill "The Cigarette Girl From the Future" ★★★★½
DeSoto, POB 60932, WDC 20039
Dischord, 3819 Beecher St, WDC 20007
Chad Clark and Abram Goodrich of Smart Went Crazy unite with two others to form the amazing Beauty Pill. Male and female vocals play off each other to form a quirky and listenable indy pop outfit that isn't describable in terms of other bands. The outstanding lyrics haunt you, entertain you, and humor you. Though it's quite different, I like this better than anything SWC ever did. The recording of this 5 song EP features a superstar cast from the DC area includes cameos by people from Fugazi, Burning Airlines, The Dismemberment Plan, etc. I highly anticipate the follow up LP to this recording. Simply one of the best things I've heard in a long time. Innovative and true.
Design 3.5stars
i used to love digipacks, then i grew to hate them. then hydrahead released a few that redefined the form. then they were too expensive to keep in print, so my sentiment returned. problem is, they came out with a new digipack that is straight up busted. it's for people on a budget, which all indy music is, so they got around everywhere as not many people like the format of the jewel case. well this is the first "budget" digipack i have seen that is really good. all the lyrics fit on the inside, so no insert is needed. simple and pleasing colors. figure drawings on top of a nice texture compose the front. not totally eye grabbing, but this is nice and pleasant and a solid package. (DL)

Big in Japan "Destroy the New Rock" ★★
Honest Don's, POB 192027, San Fran, CA 94119
Starts a lot like Green Day but not as catchy. Goes somewhere a bit more generic. All songs are © one guy, so maybe it would be better if a little control was surrendered to the others. Really obviously a power/pop/punk songwriter dude. Why aren't people able to experiment with interesting things to do with the genre they play? How many songs do we need that sound exactly the same? Play with your vocals patterns a lot more, stop palm-muting every song, maybe even listen to 24-Hour again instead of the radio. I'm trying to be suggestive at least...
Design, Pete Menchatti ★★★½
cool looking record. don't like the hiwatt amp head on the cover, but the graphic hidden by it is really nice with good colors. nice photography and colors over all. not much attention paid to the lyric side of the insert, but at least the lyrics are legible. and, in fact, honest don's has one of the best logos out there, and it's prominent.

Black Dice "Cold Hands" CD ★★
Troubleman Unlimited
16 Willow Street, Bayonne, NJ 07002
Starts out noisy-ambient, then predictably drops into knee-jerk nonsensical chaos. Black Dice is strange, in that for all the seemingly improvisational spontaneity, they drone on and on in a rather uninteresting manner. Perhaps I anticipate something more varied, based on the "craziness" of their live show. The sounds that are delivered on this recording are repetitive and very quickly monotonous, less like a train and more like someone driving on the rim of a flat tire.
Design: Not credited. ★
many psychedelic references, mushroom print 1970's picnic blanket, bubbles landing on the water, close-ups of "nature", the problem is there is not much relating these images. nothing brings it all together, and the font is awful, handwriting would have been a more appropriate choice. if it were consistently "bad", as in kitschy bad, they might have pulled it off. however, it appears to be simply inconsistent. (RN)

Blood for Blood "Wasted Youth Brew" nostars
Victory, victoryrecords.com
POB 146546, Chicago, IL 60614
Songs about drinking and doing tough things from a super macho perspective. Probably the most offensive and least interesting record reviewed.

Bright Eyes & Son, Ambulance "Oh Holy Fools"
Saddle Creek, www.saddle-creek.com ★★★½
POB 8554, Omaha, NE 68108-0554
This CD mixes the songs of both bands, starting with the less-known Son, Ambulance (who have a great name). The main problem I have with this record has nothing to do with either band specifically, but that they clash so intensely and you're forced to listen to them one track at a time. Son, Ambulance play a smoother version of the singer/songwriter thing that I find pretty good at times and relatively offensive at others. It seems more like stereotypical singer/songwriter material, which means it seems a bit more worked out than open-mic night, but still a little too faux-personal and demo-esque for a recording. It's decent stuff, but I think the pairing with Bright Eyes may emphasize it's weaknesses. Bright Eyes return with more amazing songs. This is my bid for best band of the last 3 years. Can't really get into the "Early Years" CD, but the rest of it has yet to disappoint me in the least. On these songs the mood is slower and less intense than previous recordings, but the power is still there. Slide guitar, acoustic guitar, tons of other instruments, and a keen knack for recording. Awesome!
Design, Doug Koepsel ★★★★½
one of the most memorable record covers i've seen in a long time. simply a painting of a man riding a horse, waiving a banner of the album title. the well rendered bold colors are also featured on the inside and back paintings. great artist. features a stilt walker. brilliant. like some of the other design reviews here, not much attention paid to the inside and lyrics. however, very legible. thumbs up saddle creek and bands and artist! (DL)

Burning Airlines "Identikit" CD ★★★★
DeSoto, www.desotorecords.com
POB 60932, WDC 20039
J. Robbins and crew are back with another strong release. Great guitar work and songs. You should know Jawbox, and you either hate J's voice or you love it. I side with the latter. The slower songs are my favorite, reminding me of a crazy cross between Karate, Jawbox, Sleepytime Trio, and the Beatles. Fuck yea! Imagine that. Innovative, strong, solid. This is the type of feeling that made me like the genre that is so poorly done by so many bands. Burning Airlines is a gem is a sea of fool's gold.
Design, Jason Farrell ★★★★
great folds that come together to make an interesting cover composed of parts of the panels. hard to explain, but definitely well done. cool colors, good lyric design, and cholla sans as the font for you design nerds. very cool. (DL)

C Average "Second Reckoning" ★★★★
Kill Rock Stars
I can't decide how I feel about the new wave of Indy rockers doing ironic metal (NWOIRDIM). A band like the Champs would have us believe that there is no irony involved, but that seems spurious, and besides, without an element of reinterpretation, aren't you just faced with the bands being weaker imitations of the bands they are aping? The Northwest seems a hotbed for this whole ironic regurgitation thing, and C Average are, admittedly, far above the letter grade they give themselves when it comes to chops and licks and all the other vaguely sexual terms you use to describe music like this. I mean, really, this record rocks like a motherfucker. C Average falls somewhere between the instrumental math-metal of the Champs and the AC/DC-revisited school of the Tight Bros From Way Back When. I like that it's a two-piece: in stripping down the overblown arena-rock formula to the basic elements- the riff and the beat- the record manages to remain unpretentious and fun, still validly holding on to the "Indy" end of things in terms of a consciously formulated aesthetic, rather than wishing they were arena rock but simply not having the skillz. So, overall, pretty damn good, fun to listen to, it rocks, but haunting questions about sociological trends in alternative culture remain unanswered.
Design: C Average ★★★★★
this is one of those records where the cover is almost worth the price of admission on its own. You have to see it to fully appreciate it, but essentially it's a portrait of the band members, pictured as medieval saints in a faux-stained glass motif which is really convincingly rendered. the silver metallic ink adds that touch of class. bonus points for the band designing and creating the artwork themselves. (AB)

Chroma Key "You Go Now" CD ★★★★½
Fight Evil Records
990 North Hill St.# 206 LA, CA 90012
Slow, grooving electronica with excellent vocals. You can put this record on and listen to it intensely, or you can put it on and barely realize it's their. Chroma Key transcends the boundaries between stale computer generated tone synth and rock music. This is electronic rock that does just that, rock. But don't expect to get all pumped up to go run a marathon, put it on to think about how insane it is that you're getting ready to run a marathon and get psyched on that. One of my favorite releases this issue, and you can be sure that none of the other release sound like this. Plenty of indy bands are incorporating electronic stuff, but this band is electronic that incorporates live music.

MEDIAREADER
reviewers wanted

That's right! We need more people to help review the books, records, and videos coming in. To apply for this unpaid and gloomy position, send us an email containing an attached Word file of a review you have written for us. Be sure to format the review in the same order that we use in the magazine. To be a chosen one, it's very important that you are computer literate and able to get us the reviews by the deadline that we will send you for future issues. You will always have at least one week.

Include any personal information that you think is relevant and want us to know about, the attached review, and what types of materials you are interested in reviewing. Send it to **info@mediareader.org**

Design ★★

unfortunately, the packaging is not super interesting. blue dominates and they use a font that is being vastly overused lately. one of those futuristic cyborg looking fonts. still though, look to the music on this one, not the design.

Crushed Stars "Self Navigation" CD ★½
Simulcast, www.simulcastrecords.com
POB 703463, Dallas, TX 75370
Non-descript post-music-is-fun-to-listen-to demo-esque basement-style recordings of mostly pretty guitars chiming while drums usually are soft. Introspective but not interesting. Good inoffensive background music for emo kids to put on while making out. A lot of this post-indy rock Elliot Smith type of stuff on the market now, not much that's catching me.
Design ★★★½

simple, introspective photo of airport. nice clean, almost sterile, and very lonely design. fits music well. only complaint is that the blue screen where the lyrics appear was printed cmyk rather than pms, making the dots of the blue show and the words hard to read. (DL)

David Singer "The Cost of Living" ★★★★
Deep Elm, www.deepelm.com
POB 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236
Surprising good listen. I thought this would be just another singer/songwriter Elliot Smith type, but it's a canvas of well structured songs. Easy to listen to with smooth vocals, but nothing like Elliot Smith, not even comparable. Didn't like the electronic sample song much, but all the others are great. Sometimes quirky, sometimes smooth. ES, Bright Eyes, and the Beatles are rough comparison points, as this thing is about melody and storytelling. The eerie lyrics is the shine. I'm sure this thing took a hell of a long time to put together, with the guest performances and recording construction. I'd say time well spent. I want to hear more.
Design, John Szuch ★★★

this is almost really good, but it's really marginal. great colors and real stand out images, but the computer ruined it! I hate the grunge font that is used throughout the entire package. not very appealing on the cover, but not very legible for the lyrics. cool colors, cool images, bad font. I wish there was more attention to typography. (DL)

Diesel Boy "Rode Hard and Put Away Wet" ★
Honest Don's, POB 192027, San Fran, CA 94119
The first song on this CD is a complete rip from NOFX "Radio Song." Since Honest Don's is some sort of Fat Wrech Chords subsidiary, I can only hope and imagine that this is an inside joke between Fat Mike and Diesel Boy. I didn't think it was too funny, just foreshadowing how derivative this entire CD would prove to be of NOFX. Thing is, this band doesn't really have the same wit as NOFX, so a good chunk of it comes off as fairly misogynistic and trashy. But then again, this band is openly out there to offend the overly PC with songs like "Emo Boy" that talk trash about Jawbreaker, "Tangled Up and Blew" discusses the whole Clinton/Lewinsky fiasco from the "insert cigar" angle, and 13 others of mostly obnoxious crap. Lots of talk about being overweight or fat or whatnot. Way to go guys! Enforce some sense of punk rock beauty standard to the 12-15 year olds who will actually listen to this crap. If your parents still don't give you some sort of "allowance," I seriously doubt you'll enjoy this record. If they never did, you definitely won't enjoy it.
Design, Winni @ 3am.net ★★★½

horse theme is a definite plus. nothing too fancy here but great photos and composition create one of the records that stands out in the pile. nice use of space, overlapping most of the photos on two panels makes the booklet seem much less panel-ized. nice and clean.

Dingees "Work- for the Crucial Conspiracy!"
Tooth and Nail, www.toothandnail.com
POB 12698, Seattle, WA 98111
From the first song, I thought this band was going to give me some type of Op Ivy flashback. Making me totally psyched to rock out to the whole thing. What this becomes is horrific ska record with reggae songs thrown in Bad Brains style. Lyrics about Jah that I don't understand. Mostly positive lyrics though, which is refreshing and good. If you're into the horn punk thing, this could easily become your favorite CD and I suggest checking it out.
Design, Suzy Spiab & Pegleg ★★★★

doing the spy thing seems so passé right now. this band pulls on the confidential file thing inside a cover that's a cross of old american and soviet propaganda. defying my initial reaction, they actually pull it off well. everything fits together on this record, and i'm sure a hell of a lot of time went into every aspect of it's production. my only valid complaint is to lose the x-files office photo. very strong. (DL)

Dynamite Boy "Somewhere in America" ★
Fearless Records & www.fearlessrecords.com
13772 Goldenwest St. #545
Westminister, CA 92683
I love the way this opening riff sounds like quickly varying melody between Bad Religion and Iron Maiden. This is a very, very good combination. Unfortunately, the vocals come in just a few seconds later and start the album by proclaiming: "I may not be the smartest guy." What a fucking crusher. You had to start your brand new CD with that line? The first riff is killer, once you get beyond those few seconds, the CD becomes completely generic pop punk separated in no way from the vapid pool they have jumped into. But is there hope? I have heard something on this CD that maybe only this band could pull off. If there was more of this classic metal guitar harmonizing over the pop-punk parts, this thing would have gotten 5 stars.
Design, Logan ★★★★

i'm into the drawings. pop type art, but in a good way. sketchy but intentional, bold colors, misregistration. very cool and well done. plus, this guy logan drew everything through the entire record. it's nice to see someone getting away from computers and using skills that take more than a Photoshop crash course. very refreshing. (DL)

Earth Crisis "Last of the Sane" ★★
Victory Records
If the formation of Earth Crisis and similar militant vegan straightedge bands marked the beginning of the end of hardcore as a forum for radical political discourse, much like the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 marked the beginnings of the end for civilization (prompting the initial creation of hardcore as a forum for complaining about that), the release of Earth Crisis' cover of a Led Zeppelin song comes, appropriately, as the third-generation genetically-watered down Reagan III enters office. Both occurrences lead one to ponder why civilization and culture seem so intent on just going and going, considering that everything seems to be getting weirder and more unpleasant and ludicrous. Shouldn't the world have ended a few years ago? Earth Crisis play like machines, achieving their presumable goal of sounding like Slayer if only those guys would quit drinking and consume only muscle-building protein shakes. They sound particularly like Slayer on the opening track, a Slayer cover. The Next two choices of cover material, the aforementioned Zeppelin and a Black Sabbath song, are just weird- both bands, despite having some importance in the history of "heavy" music, were rooted in over-testosteroned versions of rhythm and blues. The Earth Crisis robot approach to music making hits all the notes, but effectively erases any connection to any sort of "soul" or feeling contained in the originals. By the time they lurch into the Rolling Stones' (!) "Paint it Black" the listener is having a good deal of difficulty believing there was not some "sweet leaf" involved in these recording sessions. The barking singer ad-libs on the mosh-breakdown section (not present in the Jagger-Richards version), "I wanna paint it Black! Blaaaack! Paint it… Buuu—lack!!" Speaking of Black, Apparently the reason all those racist Norwegian black metal records sound so bad is that they turn up the treble and mix all the low end out of their recordings, considering bass to be the frequency of the lower races. In a strangely similar way Earth Crisis seems intent on taking the earlier generation of white artists who drew influences from what was at the time regarded as black music (r+b) and distilling from it the essential caucasianness in the Stones, Zeppelin and Sabbath. I'm not accusing Earth Crisis of being racist by any means (although, like new Attorney General John Ashcroft, Earth Crisis have a history of using a disturbing coded "wipe away the drug-dealing scum" type rhetoric which is, at best, open to some nasty interpretation), just of having a pretty limited, sterile take on music which is only exacerbated by comparison to the original songs they are covering. In any case, they go on to cover the Dead Kennedy's "Holiday in Cambodia" (this is PRE- Jello Biafra losing the rights to the song, so just imagine how bad it's going to get now that he has). I was excited to see how the singer would handle warbling Biafra's signature warble, but his only vocal innovation is changing the line "right-guard will not help you here," to "your PC shit won't save you here." Good one. An unrecognizable Misfits cover and a few moshoriffic originals round out this masterpiece.
design: ★★

sean husick has been driving everyone crazy lately by shrugging his shoulders and going, "whatev." it's like he's trying to say that he's so ambivalent that the extra "er" is just too much effort. that is how i feel about this record cover. guitarist jumping six feet in the air, scary band photo. "whatev." (AB)

Edie Sedgwick "First Reflections"
Mud Memory/Dischord ★★★
The gimmick with this band is that every song is named after a celebrity, with some songs seeming to have a certain correlation to the title-bearer (Christina Ricci: "Giving low spooky hips/purse lush changeling hips"), and some seeming to be non-sequitors (Sean Young: "Left side/stay alive/right side/suicide"). I don't find the premise particularly intriguing, in fact I find it a little distracting and annoying. I don't insist that every band have something valid and important to say, but if you don't, why advertise? Nation of Ulysses style manifesto liner-notes only compound the issue. "WIth a modern heart and a postmodern mind, Edie Sedgwick says, 'We Care!'… not for a struggle or the want of a struggle, but for the icons adorning the pages of People magazine." OK, dude, that's your thing. Musically, this is two-piece mathy bass-drum-vocal stuff which does sound at times like the Minutemen (actually more like Firehose, seeing as the singing sounds more like that guy). It is Ok, but, as with the shtick, grows tiring after a few songs. This would probably have appealed more as instrumental music.
design: ★★★

the color scheme is nice. inoffensive overall. the font is a little new-agey, but otherwise this looks nice in that particular way that made me think, initially, that it would sound like braid. (AB)

El Guapo "The Geography of Dissolution" ★★★
Mud Memory Records
1645 Monroe St. NW, Washington DC 20010
Oh, I bet at least one person in this band goes to music school. Skronky free-jazz which I was able to play at work without offending any customers. Two sets recorded live to ADAT- the sound quality is good, the audience is either reverently silent or non-existent. If you like this sort of thing, check it out. If you

just need background music to make your apartment seem like a hip bohemian crash pad, check it out.

Design: ★★½

not much going on here; front and back cover depict band members, cd insert folds out to reveal two more shots of band members. inside tray cover has a tinted blue photo of a door from which to glean "cool jazz" ambience, i suppose. the main problem we have going on here is the back cover image, a photo of the buzz-cut-adorned aggro-looking bass player screaming into a microphone while veins in temples and tendons in neck bulge and strain á la some victory record circa 1988. i was misled by this into expecting something altogether different. then again, maybe that's a good thing. (AB)

Ex Models "Other Mathematics" ★★★★

Ace Fu

A more accessible Arab on Radar? Maybe a little early Braniac? These are the musical reference points I can think of for the quirky contortions of this band. It's off-putting, almost grating at moments, but the overall effect is strangely alluring; it pulls you in to its weirdness and you find yourself strangely satiated by it. The lyrical content certainly helps to solidify the creepiness. General theme seems to be sexual dynamics/mechanics, and the crazy singing and well-written lyrics are, in the end, what really makes this band work for me.

Design: ★★

while there is nothing patently wrong with the design, it is pretty bland and doesn't convey much about the band. both the band name and album title seem like they would evoke stronger graphics and images. after hearing the record, i was surprised that the cover was so innocuous. (AB)

Fabulous Disaster "Put Out or Get Out" ★★

Pink and Black Records

POB 190516, San Fran, CA 94119

Thirteen fast and tight pop-punk ballads in the vein of what you'd expect from Fat Wreck Chords, with lyrics not too far from Screeching Weasel. Seems like it could be the positive revolution soundtrack to movie about high schoolers, which is pretty much a positive thing. These four women make solid music that's been done before, but it is rare to see it from a non-male (which is frequently misogynistic and testosterone pumped) perspective. Unfortunately, I absolutely despise the way this band is being marketed, from the title of their record to their promo sheet playing up their sexuality more than their music. As my friend Steve would say, "Come on and keep it positive. More message, less exploitation."

Design ★

lots of pictures of tattoos and rock promo shots. sketchy pieced together look that somehow conveys a more personal feeling or sort of romance. modern and punky, i suppose. (DL)

Fall Silent "Six Years in the Desert" ★★★★

Revelation Records, RevelationRecords.com

POB 5232, Huntington Beach, CA 92615

This is the type of release I expected from Rev before Earth Crisis and Pantera completely ruined metal-ish hardcore. This CD is fucking good. It's tough, it has double bass rolling like crazy, the singer screams, and the guitars chug. But not like most bands releasing songs nowadays. This is smart and not generic. Super positive lyrics that are political and well written. Complicated music and a singer that's not afraid to do a little hardcore rap every now and then. Very powerful without being typical tough guy bullshit. Great record.

Design, Tom D. Kline ★★★★★

funniest record cover to come into my review bin. the general concept here is that these guys are some type of punk cowboys, speaking out from the wild west, becoming assassins of wrongdoings and spokesmen of positivity and change. robert and katie kline take photos of the wild west and the band dressed up as six shooter swinging cowboy guerrillas. I love it! (DL)

Frenzal Rhomb "Shut Your Mouth" ★★★½

Fat Wreck Chords, www.fatwreck.com

POB 193690, SF, CA 94119

This band is more or less doing a "classic" genre: a melting of early Green Day and Weezer. At times they turn like a much harder New Bomb Turks. And where most bands that are doing this thing are pathetic and either sound like a bad Green Day or a bad Weezer, this band is doing their own thing. The Australian accent probably helps them in standing above the level of genericism. Whatever it is, this band also has very good lyrics, which counts for a lot when you're doing music like this. I dig all the recording tricks and effects that most band would never do. You should here the delay on his voice sometime! Funny cdrom if you got a computer. This is great!

Design ★½

japanimation renderings of band with a bad faux-handwriting font. if you're going to write the lyrics by hand, write the lyrics by hand, but don't give me a synthesized interpretation of what a computer thinks hand writing looks like. the ONLY thing keeping this record from 1 star is that the cover looks ok in a goofy faux technicolor way. I wish I didn't have to compare all this stuff to faux-something, but this hits all the pop-don'ts at the worst type of buy-it-at-mall endorsement. bad, and i wonder if the person doing the design had ever heard the band. (DL)

Guyana Punch Line "Irritainment" CD ★★★★½

Prank, POB 410892, SF, CA 94141

This just may be the best hardcore thrash record of the year. Members seen in In/humanity, Antischism and Initial State have come together to create something so much better and more powerful than any of the aforementioned. A sense of humor reels through their lyrics, musical quirks deconstruct their music, and screaming somehow seems "fashionable" again. This is a band made of hardcore kids with the purpose of fucking with hardcore kids and the assumption that there is only one style of the genre. This release gets hardcore out of the rut it's been stuck in for some number of years. Maybe this is the year's "Shape of Punk to Come." Maybe this record wouldn't exist without Refused, but GPL sounds nothing like them, and hopefully others will be able to take this level of innovation and go somewhere just as different as GPL have.

Design ★★★★½

in/humanity had amazing design and so does gpl. whoever does the covers rules. witty cut and paste. this is modern day dada. (DL)

Howard Zinn "Heroes and Martyrs" ★★★★★

Alternative Tentacles/AK Press, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141/ PO Box 40682, San Francisco, CA 94140

Zinn's heroes and martyrs occupied turn-of-the-century America, the era that introduced industrialization and capitalism as we know it, the labor relations and class struggle issues that are now absolutely established and taken as part of American Life. This is a vital period, where capitalism would be pushed to its limits, and the United States, bastard prodigy child of Europe, could excel at the game it was born to play. Finally, a nation rich with natural resources to fuel the factories and the brilliant minds to utilize those resources, supplying product for demands still unrealized by the agrarian world. The industrial machine was kept running by the hordes of immigrants that flocked to the US to participate in this great experiment that would end the sustainant existences with which they were familiar and hopefully make them rich in the process. As a new nation with a new socio-economic system, possibility for social mobility had no obvious limit. Unfortunately, the workforce, willing and capable, were rewarded with exploitation and more work rather than a leg up on the social ladder. In addition to a lack of an established hierarchy, there was a decided lack of regulation regarding the treatment of workers.

The heroes of this era were the ones who chose to see the non-existent labor relations and insist that something be done about it, the ones who could foresee the eventual consequences of industrialization and the inevitable problems of capitalism, Emma Goldman, Sacco and Vanzetti. These are fighters who paid dearly for their belief in human rights, the people whose stories are not told in history class, the dissenters and those who stood against. The industrialization of the United States has been proclaimed far and wide as a good and natural process. We learn history as a process culminating in the American Dream, the highest standard of living in the world. The United States meets the standard because we invented it. Dissent is marginalized, if it appears at all. Howard Zinn invites us to look closer at an era of great relevance to our current condition, to get to know the ones who questioned the path America tread. By understanding the tradition in which we continue, perhaps we can learn to fight better today.

Design: John Yates (Stealworks) ★★★★★

black and red, the colors inciting revolutionary minds worldwide, predominate this simple cover. photos of emma goldman, nicola sacco, and bartolomeo vanzetti grace the booklet throughout. straightforward and elegant design for an informative package.

Industrial Jazz Group "Hardcore" ★★

I've got to say that after reading the press sheet for this record I was totally psyched to listen to it. As it turns out, it's not half as interesting. Well executed cool and smooth Jazz. It's good for what it is and everything, but I'd rather listen to my old jazz records or new jazz that's incorporating new instruments and/or pushing the limits. This isn't what I'd expect from an "industrial" jazz group. I was hoping for some late night warehouse bi-polar jam session, so "hardcore" is a hell of a title when this thing is in the same review section as Guyana Punch Line.

Design, Daphne Robinson ★★

pretty basic. maybe this is a self-release? nice and minimal. again, not too interesting (DL)

Junction 18 "This Vicious Cycle" CD ★★½

Fearless Records, www.fearlessrecords.com

13772 Goldenwest St. #545, Westminster, CA 92683

When this CD started up, I thought I put on Face to Face by accident. This is upbeat pop-punk, not FAT style, but more Face to Face style, maybe more pop than punk, but fast pop. Whatever it is, they manage to use more minor chords and seem more sincere, creating that certain nostalgia that you can feel sad to while listening to songs about girls, lost dreams, and late-night strolls. Actually sounds a little too much like Painted Thin for me, but somehow fused with Weezer. There's some good guitar work going on in here. The recording is tight and huge, coming off much different and better than the pop-punk your probably used to. The music, however, is pretty standard.

Design, Forrest Kline ★

bicycle on cover is nice. some live photos, some text. seems like the 2 colors could have been used a bit more interestingly. (DL)

Kleenex/LiLiPUT Discography 2xCD ★★★★★

Kill Rock Stars

Thank you to the folks at Kill Rock Stars for reissuing this classic and making it accessible for everyone's enjoyment! LiLiPUT was a late '70's all-girl punk band from Switzerland, whose influence spanned generations and continents, predating the Riot Grrl movement by a decade, yet practically defining the sound. This is a comprehensive history of the band, from the more standard Wire-like post punk songs to the quirky, sing-a-long marches.

LiLiPUT exemplifies the way that women play punk music and this collection is absolutely essential.

Design: promo, no art.

Last Days Of April "Angel Youth" ★★★★
Deep Elm, www.deepelm.com
POB 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236
Wow. Talk of unexpected! This record rules! Almost music you'd expect to be the soundtrack to a movie. Anthemic yet bittersweet and interesting. This Sweedish band comes into their own when the string section kicks in, driving the pop force they maintain to a new level. Solid production and great songwriting. This is by far my favorite release Deep Elm has done. Lilting harmonies, drifting guitars. Imagine that you're in Sweden during their months of darkness, and this is the only light. It is light, and it's not cheesy even thought the description is.
Design, Henrick Walse ★★★★
minimal colors. cool and reminiscent of chris ware, though much different pictures. mostly degenerated parking lots and coney island style amusement parks. color comes in to accentuate and accompany my whole "soundtrack" analysis of the record. very well done. (DL)

Lightning Bolt "Ride the Skies" ★★★★★
Load Records, PO Box 35 Providence, RI 02901
"Ride the Sky"? Godheadsilo? Perhaps, but this duo probably blew a hole through North Dakota while recording this masterpiece of noise. The fastest human drummer living today accompanying effects-laden "wall of sound" bass, thick enough to deafen even Phil Spector, resulting in blasting tirades of songs similar to the Ruins or the Boredoms or maybe even our referenced friends from Fargo. Lightning Bolt is currently the most exciting American noise band, and we are very fortunate to finally have a recording that does them justice.
Design:
promo, no art. (RN)

Love Life "The Rose He Lied By" CD ★★★★
Troubleman Unlimited
16 Willow Street, Bayonne, NJ 07002
If Edgar Allen Poe were still living today, Love Life would be his favorite band and he would listen to this CD while he was getting wasted on absinthe for inspiration. Masters of creep, Love Life construct dark repetitive dirges, with incredible female vocals that are somehow reminiscent of Danzig. Heightening the eeriness is a miraculous instrument called the guitorgan, a spine-tingling combination, certain to draw a tear or two. Love Life embody all the haunting melancholy of Baltimore, beautiful and terrifying and timeless. XOXOX.
Design: The Image Mill, Inc ★★½
the cover is a dark color photo of the band in the forest, performing a seance or conjuring the devil or something. the liner notes and lyrics are printed in script font, white on black. the cursive is a bit too cheesy to uphold the scary image, though i see where they were trying to go. (RN)

Me First and the Gimme Gimmes "Blow In The Wind" ★★
Fat Wreck Chords, www.fatwreck.com
POB 193690, SF, CA 94119
This is one of Fat Mike's side bands (front man of legendary NOFX). Goofy and kooky renditions of 60s pop hits. It's rocking retro punk with a sense of humor. Super tight and well executed, I just don't think it was a very good idea for an album.
Design ★★★½
modern-retro looking cover and booklet. cool effect on the photos to make them look like paintings. gaudy and good and goofy. martini's and rock n' roll. (DL)

Juno "A Future Lived In Past Tense" ★★★★
DeSoto, www.desotorecords.com
POB 60932, WDC 20039
Solid construction that almost defies genre comparison. Captures the same feeling as Cave In's Jupiter, but from a much different direction. Powerful pop wouldn't do it justice, unless you can call the later Jawbox recordings powerful pop without the attached meaning of "bubblegum." Intense guitar work not to far from My Bloody Valentine or even Radiohead or (gasp) Pink Floyd. This is well recorded, intricately powerful, abusively sentimental rock from Seattle. I'm not too fond of starting the album with an instrumental, but I see the point they were getting at. Recommended.
Design, Jason Farrell ★★★★
jason farrell has been doing some cool stuff lately (see also Burning Airlines review). lots of running photos over weird spaces on the panels and atypical folding booklets. a very rare and much appreciated super clean text section, even though it was running cmyk. cool package. (DL)

Mad Caddies "Rock the Plank" ★½
Fat Wreck Chords, www.fatwreck.com
Ska pop punk. Some songs sound like Bad Religion with horns. Some sound like the Bosstones crossed with Bad Religion. Some sound more like Veruca Salt. Pop punk that I catch myself tapping my foot to, less counting rhythm than counting the seconds until it goes off the CD player. I don't even know what to say really. If you're the type of person who loves to be in the pit at a Voodoo Glow Skulls or NOFX or any of the derivative Nuevo-pop-punk concerts, you're going to love this. I am not that type of person.
Design ★★★½
cool pirate theme. photo booth photos. nice looking overall. cool textures on the booklet. nothing mind-blowing but well done. (DL)

Man Afraid "Complete Discography" ★★★★★
Half-Mast Records, www.p1w.net/half-mast
POB 8344, Minneapolis, MN 55408
This CD is inspiring. It's the one drop of hope in a bucket of mediocre reviews. Charged, political music with punch, sincerity, meaning, and intelligence from a band that makes me proud to know about hardcore. This is punk rock in a 90s incarnation of the Dead Kennedys. It's dangerous; it makes you think; and it makes you want to go blow up buildings in the most honest, soul-emancipating way possible. It makes you want to stand up for what it right without being dogmatic or condescending. This band released material from 1995-1997. If you don't already know of them, you absolutely should put this release on your "next to buy" list. It's that good.
Design, Pat ★★★★
great packaging for a discography cd. lots of extra writings, memos from the band and commentary from friends on the band. live photos, flyers, the works. clean and well-done packaging that keeps the same tone as all man afraid releases.

Matt Schickele "Cities Filled With Lights" ★
Feldspar, www.feldsparrecords.com
POB 1698, NYC, NY 10013
This is painful to listen to. Bad singer/song writer stuff that wouldn't be half as bad if the singer could hit the notes he sings. Sounds like Kermit the Frog guest singing on the Mr. Roger's Show. My description may sound good, but I assure you it's a very off key Kermit.
Design ★★
once again, the computer has ruined a cover. what is a nice black and white print has been butchered by a font that looks like it was printed without the post-script file (which basically boils down to it looks "computery" and pixilated). i wish that people would let art be art, and realize that the computer is an entirely different medium- that combining the two rarely works. in fact, out of the last zillion records i've seen, only two or three have worked with combining computer type with artistic renderings. those were created by people like john yates, people that place emphasis on the importance of typography as a graphic element and understand the relation of type to graphic. again: nice print, bad cover. (DL)

The Mercury Program "All the Suits..." ★★★½
Tiger Style, www.tigerstylerecords.com
149 Wooster St. 4th Floor, NYC, NY 10012
Pretty, instrumental post-rock. Well done and interesting. Reminds me of Aloha at times, probably because of the vibes and electric piano. Jazzy, easy listening instrumental indy rock. Solid record, but not terribly interesting.
Design, Planaria ★
uses that light photo trick where you leave the shutter open while waving a lighter in front of the camera, creating some type of firecracker effect. hmmm, not too interesting at all. (DL)

None of the Above "Live at..." ★★★★★
Prank, POB 410892, SF, CA 94141
This may be the best record recorded in this entire magazine and the funny thing is: I thought it was going to be terrible. It's a live CD released 17 years after the Oklahoman performance at a local cowboy bar's "punk night" by what seems to be a bunch of highschoolers. It comes with the sketchiest photocopied cover and insert that's ever been sent to this magazine. And still, it fucking rocks like no other. A very short, but very amazing and inspirational liner note that band member Jeff Klein wrote for this release. 17 years after recording this stuff, Prank asked them to put out the record. The actually dug up the original 4-track demo cassette and re-mixed it for this release. Apparently a band that Tim Yohannan fully endorsed, NOTA play music very similar to Bad Religion, Black Flag, and Agent Orange. This is early 80s punk rock, before it started sucking in the early 90s. This is the most honest music and the most brutally political lyrics, all of which are still completely valid right now in 2001. Lyric: "Poison the water / poison the air / nuclear waste and you don't care / against abortion in your church / while pollution kills the earth / sick society." This CD sure doesn't sound like the new Sunny Day album, it sounds like MIA: dangerous.
Design: ★★★★★
i commend prank for releasing a record with such an intensely sketchy cover. photocopied picture of the band from almost 20 years ago. bold move, bold record. (DL)

Phantom Patient "Songs from Downstairs" ★★★½
Entartete Kunst
POB 411194, San Fran, CA 94141
Cool, laid-back electronica from a label that's been putting out a good amount of great, more lo-fi style releases. This CD is marketed as a "Glaswegian subversion electro gothic hip hop nightmare" and I suppose it is indeed some type of electronic evil. Nice use of sampling, voices, and ambient electronica. Not the type of CD made for dancing, but solid listening for most of everything else. I imagine you wouldn't find this in your local record store, so take the chance and send the label the $8.
Design ★★
lo-fi computer work. a ton of illegible type on one of the panels, some kraftwerk looking stuff on another. skeletons and faceless people, surgery, death and the like.

Propagandhi "Today's Empires,..." ★★★★★
Fat Wreck Chords, www.fatwreck.com
POB 193690, SF, CA 94119
Propagandhi's decision to be on Fat has upset just about every kind of punk kid in the world. From the archaic and fundamentalist DIY squat rocker to the Nuevo I-only-know-NEW-Bad Religion-and-Lagwagon type of crowd. They're the band that doesn't fit, and to this day I still have no idea how the deal worked out. On one hand you have a label that has a history of releasing fairly misogynistic - overtoned songs from tons of bands that all sound, more or less, the same; and on the other, you have a band that is so over the top in expressing their left-wing, super PC political ideals. They essentially use their music the

same way that Howard Zinn uses books: it's a functional outlet for their ideas. So what do you do with this scenario, and how do you analyze it? Everyone has their own take on even the most trivial matters, and I respect both the label and the band for this group effort. On one hand, all the Ebullition fans have guilty thoughts about buying this record because of the label it's on; on the other hand, kids who listen exclusively to more mainstream punky pop have no idea what they're getting when they buy a brand-loyalty-induced "safe" release at Tower. And really, how much are you really missing the entire point of what these people are singing about if you're willing to talk about a record label's representation more than something that is actually real: something that is actually affecting people's lives more than one indy label vs. another, or one corporate label vs. another, or whatever stone you are quick to pick up. So this is it, Propagandhi's first LP in three years. During that time, old bass player left and started the Weakerthans. New bass player came into band, aptly that of the now defunct I-Spy. The product is a political hardcore record. Not like any of their past efforts, but hardcore like the great Reagan-reactionary Dead Kennedys. This is not poppy, and it's not jokey. It's fucking good, and, unlike almost every other band that exist nowadays, the lyrics are important because they're political and intelligent. Will this blow some kid's mind who will never give this magazine a read, and will never understand what DIY means, and will never listen to the Dead Kennedys or the Minutemen? It should, and if it doesn't, there is no hope left. The TV shows and the flickering fluorescents have numbed us down and rendered us incapable of standing on any type of ethical ground or understanding of equality. I think there's still something there, some flicker of hope, and I do think that someone who will pick up this record and have her mind blown. It should be all of us.

Design, ★★★★

great painting of us flag imprisoning the rest of the globe, legible type, and loads of information on independent media outlets and kingpins. enhanced cd contains much more reading material and profiles other points that should be of interest if you have a computer. beautiful cd-rom design as well. solid package. (DL)

Red Animal War "Breaking in an Angel" ★★★

Deep Elm, www.deepelm.com

POB 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236

Pretty cool songs that you can sing along with without feeling stupid. Interesting songs and complicated break downs. Start/stop formula but done better than most new bands coming out now, not quite as good as the bands that used to do it. Maybe it's because this formula has been done a lot now, but nothing here is really catching me. Solid vocals, but definitely not unique or forging new ground. Take it or leave it.

Design, David Slack ★★

the package looks an awful lot like the cover of photoshop. computer literate, but not too interesting. the song lyrics are hard to read because each individual line is too long. "professional," but not very good. (DL)

Red Scare "Strangers Die Everyday" CD ★★★★

Troubleman, www.troublemanunlimited.com

16 Willow St., Bayonne, NJ 07002

The final album from Knoxville's most loved band. Eight songs of Shotmaker-inspired hardcore. Thundering music and spoken screams reveal a life of horrid abstraction-induced post-industrial terror. My only complaint is that, where their previous recordings were fusing early 90s hardcore with their more Shellac-esque math tendencies, this recording heavily lends itself to the Shotmaker side. Though this may not be the most experimental Red Scare record floating around, this is the most solid recording and execution of their style. Great release!

Design, Red Scare ★★★½

more solid red scare album art. pulling away from the more obvious communist propaganda thing is a good move. silver, black and red create the coldness and silence. simple yet elegant. fucking amazing picture on the inside, it should have been the cover. (DL)

Rise Against "The Unraveling" ★★★½

Fat Wreck Chords, www.fatwreck.com

POB 193690, SF, CA 94119

Best pop-punk record I've heard in a long time. Upbeat and "hard." This feels honest, and the singer rocks. Gruffy voice and he sings with no reference to the bubble gum pop edge that's infected most of his contemporaries. If you want to give the genre another chance, check this band out; if you're into this label, definitely check this record out.

Design, L. Rey ★½

cover looks like "new school" in 1997. the quirky cover art is cool and well-drawn, alluding to a futuristic, impressionistic world. the computer work here with font, arrangement, etc. gives it the "new school" comment. i'm not sure where this band is from, but lots of bands from both orange county and boston release records that look like this. slick but not catchy, but not offensive. can't read the lyrics at all. (DL)

Roto "The Low Power Hour" ★½

Resin, www.resinDC.com

POB 5601, WDC 20016

Very bad attempt at avant-garde. Two tracks of poorly executed dueling vocals that are usually dissonant with each other, either indicating the singer can't sing or this band has succeeded in perfectly executed terrible music. Noodle guitars. The drummer to DC based Q and Not U makes a cameo on this album, which is not enough to make this album good.

Design, John Davis & C. Ingram ★★½

i really like the photos, i really dislike the font. new age techno feel. wish they would have pushed more towards the photos than feeling like they had to crop white space into them. font font. come on, the font is just crazy bad! (DL)

Swallowing Shit CD ★★★★

G-7 Welcoming Committee

www.g7welcomingcommittee.com

Another brilliant and important release from G7. I assume this is the discography release of this band, but it's a bit unclear. Nonetheless, Swallowing Shit, who features a member that went on to be in Propagandhi, play unflinching grind core punk rock thrash with the most political lyrics you'll ever read. Sense of humor and what's going on. This band apparently disbanded in 1997 when 300 Christians swarmed one of their shows. Lyrics: "The religious right must be crushed and every law governing the right to choose [abortion] must be repealed now." This was way before apolitical contemporaries like the Locust, and to quote a review from a previous issue of this magazine, this makes the Locust sound like a flock of seagulls.

Design, ★★

this is punk rock, black and white, blurry image. cool and fitting, but definitely not genre defying, shocking, or very interesting. (DL)

Right Brigade s/t CD ★★

Revelation Records, RevelationRecords.com

POB 5232, Huntington Beach, CA 92615

14 more songs of the classic Rev sound. In the vein of the greats: Youth of Today, GB, etc. Nothing too special, but well done hardcore without the youth crew parts. Personal lyrics about alienation and not trusting people that allude to being political, but remain personal. Big minus on the name of this band, as I don't think they are "in line" with the same things that the Bad Brains were trying to promote or aspire to. Also think it's weird to name your band after a song by perhaps the most important punk band that ever existed, a band who came into the scene from an angle never before seen or even understood. This band isn't breaking down any walls or demonstrating any PMA. Regardless, good record if you still find the genre inspiring or meaningful. And you'll probably love it if you don't know what the second half of this review is about.

Design, James Woodlawn & Scott Prospect ★★★

probably the simplest cd i have for review, but really nice. just two colors here, a metallic reddish and black, but they're arranged so they both have lots of space to breath, never getting too busy. no photos, mainly dark silhouettes that have been manipulated into being "photocopied." nice job overall.

Starflyer 59 "easy come easy go:1994-2000" ★★★★

Tooth and Nail

A two-CD set documenting the 6 LP career of a band I've never heard of. Really quite good, actually. It's hard to say, in retrospect, whether this band was as innovative as the liner notes claim, but SF59 knock out a pretty varied bunch of styles, from drop-d tuned shoegazer rock to reverby Cure-sounding stuff, and even some early-Radiohead sounding songs- in other words, a good cross-section of what was called "alternative rock" from 1994-2000; innovativeness would depend on that fine line of whether certain songs were released six months before Radiohead or six months after. Not that it really matters— history is written by the victors, and at this point the "important" bands of the 90's have probably been set in stone by Rolling Stone, and SF59 is an also-ran. This just goes to show the arbitrariness of it all, because while there are plenty of bands that sound like this, this band do what they do really well, at least as well as their better-known contemporaries.

design: Cory Little. ★★★★

somebody at tooth and nail really likes this band, apparently, because the packaging is extravagant and oozes love. a thick, full-color booklet contains extensive liner notes, reproductions of all their record covers (which are consistently good- the band seems to have a good aesthetic sense in general), a cool gatefold package, and a simple, eye-catching, silver red and black color scheme. (AB)

The Stereo "No Traffic" ★★★½

Fueled by Ramen, www.fueledbyramen.com

POB 12563, Gainsville, FL 32604

Weezer with a heavy classic rock influence. The singer can really sing and lets it go sometimes with "Oh-E-Oh" harmonies. Quickly played, tight, pop music. Feels good to listen to and these guys have stumbled on the formula. I hadn't heard Weezer, I just may love this band. However, a big part of Weezer is the ridiculous lyrics they sing, satire and humorous articulation. We don't necessarily have that here. But hell, there's room for a zillion NOFX rip offs, and this smokes that, so there's definitely room here as well.

Design ★★★★

this band always has great looking records. very strong typography and photography. they've invented a "look" for themselves and it's great. i do hate the digipack though. the lyric sheet just slides into the case loose, wanting to fall out. go the extra yard and get the digipack with a pocket! (DL)

Ultivac "s/t" CD ★★

the Buddy System, www.thebuddysystem.com

302 Bedford Ave. #264, Brooklyn, NY 11211

2/3 of the Hal-al-Shedad unite for a bass and drums combo with the addition of Year Zero front man Jonathan Lukens. Musically, this album is superior to most stuff coming out right now. Interesting patterns, great bass playing, and cool electronic elements. I just can't take the singing. The tortured, early DC-esque emo-core vocaling completely gets in the way of the band. Seems like it could be great with interesting singing or almost anything but what's on it. End analysis: super music with bad singing. If you can get

past the negative, you'll love the positives. I can't seem to move on.

Design ★

orangey-yellowish gradiated image on both sides with name of band and songs in a relatively generic font. not that interesting any way you cut it. (DL)

Unwound "leaves turn inside you" ★★★
Kill Rock Stars

Unwound's music is the music of profound mopeyness, the soundtrack not to dissatisfaction or rebelliousness, but to total spiritual malaise. At least that's how I've always thought of them. Even when they rock out, it's never euphoric in intent, there is always a sense of moroseness to it- The Future of What's first track screamed its accusation to the youth: "where's your energy? There's no energy," and it wasn't intended as a call to arms, it seemed more a description of our sorry state. But this new Unwound album: where's the gloom? It drones, it plods, it rarely rocks, which is OK with me, I like the band best when they are in slow and epic mode, but in this sprawling double album there seems to be a heretofore absent sense of ease and comfort in the songs. The intent no longer seems to be to crush your will to live. Sad but true: they've "mellowed out."

design: ★

i can't comment too extensively, as there was no artwork included in the promo copy. saw a copy at the record store. looks like it took about two seconds to put together. there's a fine line between minimalism and just boring. (AB)

V/A - Juno & The Dismemberment Plan
split CD ★★★★
DeSoto, www.desotorecords.com
POB 60932, WDC 20039

DP start the CD and continue with their quirky, schizophrenic style that plays off great vocal lines, the meshing of electronica, and generally keeping the audience on their toes. The hecticness first song reminds me a bit of the Rah Bras. DPs next song is a home recorded guitar and vocals track. Good melody and very well executed. I wish I could understand the lyrics to this one, seems like they're really good. Juno hits us with two more strong tracks of their specialty. The more I listen to this band, the more I like them. Check out their full length review for more info.

Design ★

simple drawings of fruit. you can tell this was a split and that neither band cared too much about what it looked like. not too memorable, just functional. (DL)

Various Artists "Turbo's Tunes" ★★★★★
Kill Rock Stars

This is a retrospective sampler of stuff the Kill Rock Stars label has put out over the last decade, and it is a testament to the strength and diversity of the label. Especially good to hear is the number of women's voices, and generally the number of women playing in these bands (actually, I think that there is a woman in every band except for the three male solo artists included here). The bigger names (Sleater Kinney, Unwound) are there, but the lesser known bands and artists put in solid tracks as well. I suppose culling 19 good songs from the KRS catalog is not exactly a Herculean task; still, it's great to hear this.

design

i imagine that, unlike the promo copy, the actual item does not come in a badly-xeroxed neon-orange sleeve. if it does, i give this thing five stars. (AB)

TOAST
JILL BRAZIL - THE SONGS OF JILL BRAZIL CD
MEGABRATS - ODE TO MINTOR 7"
BOTH BANDS TOURING SUMMER 2001 - CD $6 ppd - 7" $3 ppd
CASH OR CHECK PAYABLE TO JOHN TOSCH
POOL or POND - PO BOX 2084, BELLINGHAM, WA 98227-2084
www.poolorpond.net poolorpond@altavista.com
S.E.P. - UD - SESSION II - 1999-1999 ? HELLO .

diy RECORDS
WE SPECIALIZE IN OI! AND ALSO CARRY:
SKA
HARDCORE
PUNK
WE HAVE THE CHEAPEST PRICES ON CAPTAIN OI! CDS
T-SHIRTS / BOOKS / PATCHES / ZINES / POSTERS
ALL MAILORDER PRICES ARE POSTAGE PAID WWW.diyRECORDS.COM

busy beaver

1-inch

1" buttons and rubber stamps

Button prices ---→ $25 for 100
$100 for 500

This includes 1st class postage and black ink
on any standard color paper (white if you don't say).

multi-color or colored ink add $5/100 ($0 $30 for 100 buttons or $125 for 500)

It's Easy!
just send ---→ your art
---→ check, MO or cash (to Busy Beaver)
---→ your address and phone #
turnaround generally 7-10 days after I get the order

Busy Beaver
PO Box 87676
Chicago, IL 60680

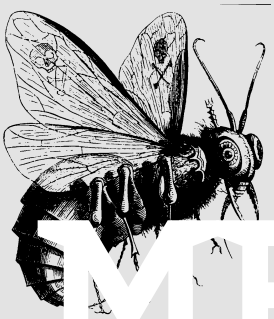
www.busybeaver.net
buttongal@earthlink.net
info-line 415 789 8235
phone 773 645 3359

MEDIAREADER reviewers wanted

That's right! We need more people to help review the books, records, and videos coming in. To apply for this unpaid and gloomy position, send us an email containing an attached Word file of a review you have written for us. Be sure to format the review in the same order that we use in the magazine. To be a chosen one, it's very important that you are computer literate and able to get us the reviews by the deadline that we will send you for future issues. You will always have at least one week.

Include any personal information that you think is relevant and would like us to know about, the attached review, and what types of materials you are interested in reviewing. Send it to :

info@mediareader.org



MEDIA READER

WWW.MEDIAREADER.ORG